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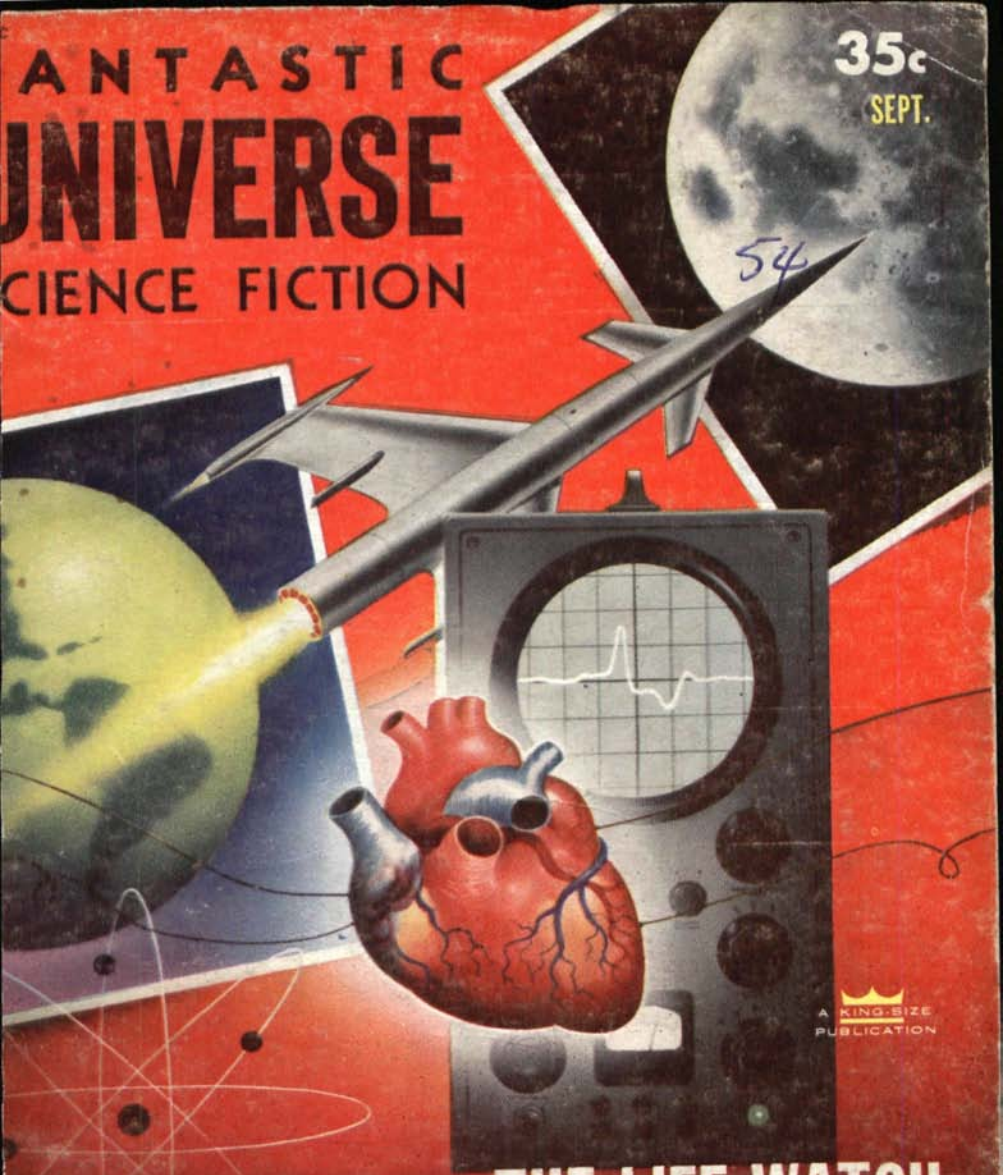

A KING-SIZE PUBLICATION

THE LIFE WATCH

A Complete Short Novel

By LESTER DEL REY

LL STORIES IN THIS ISSUE BRAND NEW

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FANTASTIC UNIVERSE

SEPT. 1954
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How I foxed the Navy

by Arthur Godfrey

The Navy almost scuttled me. I shudder to think of it. My crazy career could have ended right there.

To be scuttled by the Navy you've either got to do something wrong or neglect to do something right. They've got you both ways. For my part, I neglected to finish high school.

Ordinarily, a man can get along without a high school diploma. Plenty of men have. But not in the Navy. At least not in the U. S. Navy Materiel School at Bellevue, D. C., back in 1929. In those days a bluejacket had to have a mind like Einstein's. And I didn't.

"Godfrey," said the lieutenant a few days after I'd checked in, "either you learn mathematics and learn it *fast* or out you go. I'll give you six weeks." This, I figured, was it. For a guy who had to take off his shoes to count above ten, it was an impossible assignment.

I was ready to turn in my bell-bottoms. But an ad in a magazine stopped me. Here, it said, is your chance to get special training in almost any subject—mathematics included. I hopped on it. Within a week I was enrolled with the International Correspondence Schools studying algebra, geometry and trig for all I was worth.

Came week-end liberty, I studied. Came a holiday, I studied. Came the end of the six weeks, I was top man in the class. Within six weeks I had mastered two years of high school math, thanks to the training I'd gotten.

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the life watch

by . . . Lester del Rey

Norden could not trust his own darkly terrifying thoughts and impulses. Yet he kept a life watch over the whole human race.

NORDEN COULD FEEL dread knot his mind as he watched the tiny blue speck against the black sky. It was a senseless, unnatural emotion, and he knew it. The searing blue point of flame could only mean that the approaching ship was powered by atomic rockets—and the Aliens drove their ships in some mysterious manner, without any kind of reaction motor. The object coming down toward the tiny asteroid could only be of terrestrial origin, powered by a human device.

Yet his fear grew worse. He shook his head, wondering again how close to insanity he had drifted. His eyes darted sideways, scanning the wreckage that had been his laboratory, then back to the descending ship. Mercifully, he couldn't remember most of what had happened. He only knew that it had been sufficiently bad to drive any human close to the brink of madness. It would have been torturing enough to be left alone for days in a wrecked

The spread of an alien culture across wide wastes of space, with its almost inevitable, remorseless destruction of human life, has chilling implications even for the literal-minded. When mirrored in the bright, adventurous prism of modern science fiction it offers unparalled opportunities to a writer of Lester del Rey's stature. We're sure you'll agree that he's scored a triumph in this brilliantly imaginative yarn.

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and airless dome while the oxygen tanks were used up, one by one. But to have seen Hardwick's face when the Aliens caught him . . .

He tried to stop thinking about it. The Aliens were only vague shadows in his mind now—the picture of what must have happened as remote and unreal as his memories of struggling free from the wreckage.

Somehow, he'd survived against incredible odds, undetected by the Aliens. He'd dug out the emergency transmitter and tried signaling for help. Now apparently, before the last tank of oxygen on his back had been used up completely, rescue had come. He should have been ecstatic with relief.

The fear remained, some twisted reaction left over from the days of terror and hopelessness. He lifted his hands and studied them. They were steady enough; the fear was having no outward effect.

Already the ship was close enough for Norden to see glints of weak sunlight reflecting from its metal hull. The pilot must have been one of the best, for there was no wavering, or side-jetting to correct the course. It was coming straight down, slowing to a drift. As Norden stared the exhaust hit the jagged surface of the asteroid and splashed out. Abruptly it cut off, and the ship dropped slowly the few remaining feet, to come to rest less than half a mile away.

Norden knew he should start running toward it, and stood up. But he couldn't give the order to his legs. He stared toward the ship, then back at the ruins. Maybe there was something he should take with him. He had air enough for another hour. Surely there was no need to rush things. Men would be coming here for him. And it wouldn't do any harm to put off meeting them a little longer. He didn't want to be subjected to their questions yet.

He started hesitantly toward the ship, trying to force himself to move. Men began to emerge and head toward him. He dropped onto a mess that had been a super-speed tape instrument recorder and waited.

His mind was running a rat-race inside his head, and there was a gnawing tension. He cleared his throat and reached for the switch on his suit radio. The men were almost up to him. He got to his feet again, fumbling frantically with the little switch.

Then the harsh beam of a flashlight picked him out, and a gruff voice sounded in his headphones. "Dr. William Norden?"

He nodded, and rehearsed words stumbled to his lips. "Thank God, you got here! I was afraid the transmitter wouldn't work!"

There was a hint of something like kindness in the voice. "Take it easy, Dr. Norden! It did work, and we're here. What happened

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to Hardwick? Where is he?"

"Dead, I hope," Norden answered. "The Aliens got him!" He shuddered, glancing at the spot where it had happened.

The man wearing general's insignia nodded, while sickness spread over his face. He motioned to one of the others. "Get pics of the wreck, and collect any records you can. The rest of you give Dr. Norden a hand. And hurry! They may have spotted us already!"

The man with the camera went resolutely to work, flashing his shots with a strobe light that blinked twenty-four times a second. Two others began unrolling a stretcher.

Norden shook his head in feeble protest. "I can walk. And I've already collected Hardwick's notebooks."

They set a pace closer to a run than a walk, bouncing ludicrously in the slight gravity of the asteriod. Norden kept up with them easily enough, trying to make sense of his reactions. Most of the fear and tension had left him, as if he'd passed over some hurdles, and was experiencing a resurge of confidence. The military efficiency of his rescuers had also a bracing effect. Maybe he hadn't believed in his rescue until now. But he did feel better, though his eyes went on studying the others cautiously, as if looking for any reaction that might inadvertently betray them.

They reached the ship, and began pulling themselves through its flexible hatch. The leader jerked off his helmet and suit, exposing iron grey hair that contrasted rather startlingly with an almost youthful face. It was the face of a man who hadn't let himself grow soft during the years before the Aliens came. He swung toward Norden.

"How much gravity can you take, Dr. Norden?" he asked. "Six g's?"

"In a hammock, for a few minutes," Norden answered.

They were already heading up the ladder toward the nose of the ship. The general ripped a sling out of its case when they reached the control cabin. He snapped it to its lugs, motioned Norden onto it, and bound him in place in less time than he could have ordered the job done. Then he dropped to his own control seat. "Six g's for five minutes, then hold her at four until I order. Up ship!"

Norden didn't black out during the first five minutes, though the pressure was enough to drive the sling to its bottom mark and make its cables groan in protest. As they switched from six to four gravities, the pressure eased a little.

An hour crept by, and another. When the general finally ordered the drive cut, Norden estimated that they had been under acceleration for nearly five hours and were doing about two million miles an

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hour. Either the general was crazy, or the ship must have been stocked to the last bin with fuel. They were making more than five times the normal emergency speed.

Then the leader came back and began releasing Norden. "Sorry to give you such a beating after what you've been through, Dr. Norden," he said. "But we'll still be lucky if we have enough speed to slip past their detectors before they can trace our orbit and overhaul us. They've been getting worse lately."

He sighed, and his lips thinned. Then he shrugged. We'll talk about that later. Right now you need food." He managed a smile. "I don't have to tell you that the doctor and psychiatrist will be biting their nails to give you the works. Oh, I'm Armsworth."

Norden felt the chill touch his mind again. He'd expected a doctor, and had been bracing himself for one. But the *psychiatrist* . . . He forced calmness into his voice. "I could eat a horse!"

"You probably will," Armsworth told him with quick, automatic humor. "This is the Space Service!"

The little cabin to which Armsworth took him was crowded alarmingly. There were the two men waiting for him, with their specialized equipment. In addition, there was the forbidding bulk of a large recording machine ready to take down every word he uttered. He acknowledged the introductions, and downed a glass of some over-sweetened fruit juice which the doctor held out.

"It will get you ready for some real food," the physician told him. "Would you like to clean up while I look you over, before the main course comes?"

Norden seized on the chance. It would give him something to do beside tormenting himself, and it was obvious he needed grooming. His dark hair was matted, his face marked with dirt that had sunk into every wrinkle and line, and there was a thick growth of stubble on his skin. It was a thin, fairly good-looking face, as unfamiliar as if he'd just seen it for the first time in a photograph. He seemed to have forgotten *himself*, even.

While he washed and shaved, the doctor was busy. But the examination was less detailed than he had expected it would be, and finally the man stood back, nodding.

"For someone nearing forty, you're in excellent shape, Dr. Norden," he said. "You had a rough time of it, but I was sure you'd be all right physically when I heard you hadn't blacked out under high acceleration. Okay, go ahead and eat."

He moved toward the door, but showed no sign of leaving until his curiosity could be satisfied.

Norden had to force himself to eat, for he had no apparent ap-

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petite. The psychiatrist leaned forward casually, watching him. "Would you like to tell us about it, Dr. Norden?" he asked. "Precisely what happened to Hardwick?"

Norden shook his head, while the tension mounted again. The man would be on the alert for hidden meanings in his words, and he wasn't quite ready for that. Yet he was afraid to risk putting it off. "I'm not sure I can tell much. I—well, everything's pretty foggy. A lot of it I can't remember at all."

"Partial amnesia is fairly common," the psychiatrist said reassuringly. "In fact, everyone has touches of it. Try going back a bit—say to your childhood—to give you a running start. We've got plenty of time."

Norden had little interest in his childhood, and he skimmed over it with a few words. He'd done nothing unusual until he'd drifted into the new investigation of radiation outside the electromagnetic spectrum in his postgraduate college work. Then he'd suddenly developed, caught fire, and become something of a genius.

He was the first man ever to prove there was more than theory involved. He'd been called to Mars for the Widmark Interplanetary Award for his brilliant demonstration of protogravity after he'd floated two ounces of lead with a hundred thousand dollars worth of equipment that used twenty killowatts of power.

In fifteen years at Mars Institute, he'd discovered four new types of extra-spectral radiation, become a full professor, and had *almost* discovered how to harness nuclear binding energy.

Then the Aliens had come. They had appeared abruptly near Pluto, apparently coming at a speed greater than that of light, in strange globular ships that defied radar detection. Without provocation or mercy, they had sought out and destroyed every settlement between Pluto and Saturn, and had begun moving inward, systematically destroying all life in their path.

Nobody had ever seen an Alien —they invariably exploded to dust before they could be captured—but the horror of their senseless brutality was revealed in the hideous human corpses they left behind them.

Norden had been drafted while there was still optimism. Men could build a hundred ships to the Aliens' one, equally radar-proof, free from danger of magnetic or electronic detection, and nearly invisible in space. In anything like an even battle, men were certain to win. But they soon discovered it wasn't an even battle.

The Aliens had some means of detecting human ships accurately at distances of millions of miles, and blasting them with self-guided torpedoes, while remaining undetected themselves. And behind

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the torpedoes would come the dark globular ships to spray the wreckage with some force that left every cell utterly lifeless.

Hardwick had been a quasi-scientist, mixed up with certain weird cults, who maintained a private laboratory on an asteriod near Jupiter's orbit. And in the desperation that followed the first foolish optimism, his theory that the Aliens could detect life itself, or the presence of the questionable mitogenetic rays that were supposed to radiate from nerve endings, was actually taken seriously.

Surprisingly, the tests indicated that remote-controlled ships which had been completely sterilized went undetected, while ships carrying rats or other life were blasted. Norden, as the expert on all strange radiation, had been sent to work with Hardwick in attempting to devise a screen for the hypothetical life radiation.

He never learned whether Hardwick was a wild genius, or an even wilder lunatic. While he was wearing Hardwick's improvised shield during one of the attempts to test it, the Aliens had landed and broken in.

"What did they look like?" the psychologist asked casually—too casually, Norden felt.

"Well, they—" He frowned, trying to remember, but a clamp came down over his mind. "I—I can't remember. And they did—something—to Hardwick. I—I..."

Armsworth brushed the other question aside. "Never mind. You were wearing Hardwick's shield. Didn't they notice you?"

Norden shook his head doubtfully. "No, I don't think they did. It's all horribly blurred. I think I jumped for the spacesuit locker when they breeched the airlock on the dome. I must have gotten into a suit, and been hidden by the locker door. And I must have run out after they took Hardwick away."

At least he hadn't been hurt when the Alien bomb ruined the dome. He'd dug out the transmitter, sent the message, and then had spent the agony of waiting in trying to decipher the cryptic code in Hardwick's notebooks.

They went over his account several times, but he could tell then little more. Then there were tests, some of which he could understand and answer without trouble, while others left him taut with uncertainty and etched worried lines into the face of the psychiatrist. But at last the man nodded doubtfully.

"I think he'll do," he reported hesitantly to Armsworth. "A traumatic experience always leaves scars, but . . ."

"But or no he'd better do," Armsworth said gruffly. "No wonder they ordered us out to pick him up! He was within fifty feet of the Aliens, and they didn't locate him! Dr. Norden, if that shield works and you can dupli-

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cate it, you'll be the most valuable man alive!"

"And the tiredest and sleepiest," Norden suggested. His eyes narrowed, and his mind darted about, seeking some sign of the wrong reaction. Then he relaxed as the doctor and psychiatrist picked up their equipment and went out with advice he hardly heard. Armsworth lingered, and Norden searched about in his mind for what seemed to be a safe question.

"How long until we reach Mars, general?" he asked.

"We don't!" Armstrong's voice was suddenly thick and bitter. "We've abandoned Mars. The Aliens have moved inward. We —oh, hell, we'll reach our new laboratory on the Moon base in about four days! And you'd better start praying that shield works, or my value to you won't be worth salvaging."

He shrugged abruptly and left, closing the cabin door quietly behind him. Norden slumped down on the bed, not bothering to remove his clothes.

Automatically, he lifted his arms until both his hands were pressing against the nape of his neck, settled into a comfortable position against the automatic straps, and began reviewing all the events of his rescue carefully. And bit by bit, the worry in his head quieted. He'd gotten away with it. What "it" was, he didn't know or even remotely suspect, but the horrible tension was gone.

II

It was a short-lived respite, for no sooner had Norden reached the base on the Moon where the frenzied activity of the new laboratories went on than the tension returned.

The taped interviews had been signaled ahead, together with Hardwick's notebooks and Norden's suggested list of equipment. Apparently, the information on him hadn't been satisfactory. He was rushed to a small, rectangular room where three men mumbled and complained unhappily as he was given tests that served no purpose that he could see.

And finally, he was forced to wait in the corridor outside for nearly an hour while the three conferred, before he was given an envelope of papers and led to the office of General Miles, head of the entire Moon base.

Miles skimmed through the reports and reached for the hushed phone. He was a man of indeterminate age, with a young voice and old eyes. There was a curious grace to his gaunt body, and a friendly smile on his rough-hewn face, despite telltale marks of exhaustion.

Norden watched him tensely, but his reactions were not revealing until he turned back abruptly, and extended his hand.

"You're in, Dr. Norden," he said. "What you urgently need is rest. You've had a devil of a time of it, and you show it. But we

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can't afford to let you go." He nodded grimly. "You're no more psychotic than I am, since you're able to work. And we need your work. The last settlement on Mars was just wiped out before we could evacuate it. Hardwick's notes are pure gobbledegook, so we *have* to depend on your help. Come on."

He stood up and led Norden through a narrow door, and into a tunnel that connected GHQ with a large Quonset-type building to the south.

"We've secured everything we could for you." he explained. "We even got you an assistant, and the exclusive use of our largest computer." He threw open the door to the laboratory, and gestured. "It's *all yours*. I'll be around from time to time, but if you need anything extra-special don't hesitate to ask for it. All of our work is important but you have top priority here."

Norden closed the door firmly as the general left, studying the equipment—more than he'd dreamed they could provide. To them, he was probably off balance. But at the moment, he was convinced they would have given top priority to a man who could do the Indian rope trick. It seemed like a careless way of running things, particularly since they hadn't put a guard over him, or hinted at a penalty for failure.

He moved back through the laboratory, studying the equipment. Again, there was the disturbing sense that his experience had blanked out whole sections of his mind, until he had to puzzle out apparatus he must have used a thousand times. But it was still obvious that the laboratory had everything he could possibly want —and more.

He wandered back and around the big computer, and almost collided with a small, brown-haired girl in a lab smock who looked up at him with eager interest, her slender hands busy with the keyboard.

"Dr. Norden? I'm Pat Miles, your assistant. I hope you won't let the fact that the general is my father disturb you. I had three years of extraspectral math and paraphysics at Chitec, and I'm a registered computer operator in my own right, grade one." She smiled at him.

He knew at once that she was the guard placed over him—an extremely attractive guard who would keep the general informed as to his progress. But a known factor was always better than an unknown one. He offered her his hand, and she took it quickly.

"Glad to have you, Pat," he said. "But until I can decode Hardwick's notes from what little I've learned of them, there won't be much to do."

He'd decided that it was a reasonable job, and one which would take up enough time for him to orient himself. After

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that . . . his mind skidded off the subject.

She pointed to the work table by the machine where the notes lay spread out. "I've been systematizing it already. If you can supply half a dozen keys, the computer should be able to translate the rest."

It rocked him for a second. He hadn't thought of the possibility, and it meant an end to stalling, long before he could be ready. But there was nothing he could do about it. He picked up the notes, and began pointing out the few phrases he had learned, together with the only clear memory he seemed to have of his time with Hardwick.

"The last page covers the final test," he told her. "Hardwick had some cockroaches and mosquitoes left over from an experiment with various vermin, and he put them in a glass case. I stood at one side with the screen he'd made on me, and he stood on the other. Apparently he figured the things could sense the human aura, and the roaches should move toward my absence of one, the mosquitoes toward him for food. But there was no statistical evidence of its success."

She began feeding information to the machine, and reeling out the results, checking with him. At first, he begrudged the work, but then he found his interest quickening in the puzzle and its untangling. She was good at the work, though she found it hard to believe that the cult-inspired nonsense could be a correct translation.

He began trying to anticipate the problems of her programming, and to scan the results, cross-checking to reduce errors from his own confusion.

Finally she nodded. "That's it, Bill. The computer can cross-check the rest itself. All I've got to do is cut the notes on a tape, and feed them in. Why don't you go to lunch while I'm doing it? Dad has you scheduled for his table, down in the GHQ basement cafeteria."

"What about you?" he asked.

She shook her head. "I want to finish this. Go on, don't keep Dad waiting."

Norden found most of the seats filled, but Miles saw him and waved him over. There was a round of introductions to names that were famous in their fields—famous enough for even Norden to recognize, though he'd stuck pretty closely to his own specialty.

"How's it shaping up?" Miles wanted to know.

"We should have the notes decoded tonight," Norden told him. "After that, it's a matter of how useful they'll be."

Miles grunted unhappily. "They'd better offer a more promising lead than the others we've had. And soon! At this rate, in two more weeks at most, the Aliens will be taking over the

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Moon—and if that happens, we may as well stay here waiting for them."

He turned to the head psychologist, while Norden was still hunting for the meaning of the implied threat he thought he could read into the words. "Jim, what about Enfield?"

"No dice," the psychologist answered. "He's obsessed with xenophobia—he hates the Aliens for breakfast, lunch and between meals. I can't treat him here. Of course, after what happened to his wife . . ."

Miles put his fork down and faced the group, but his eyes were on Norden. His words had the ring of an often-delivered but still vital lecture. "Damn it, we can't afford hatred. Maybe the mobs need it to keep them going. But we have serious things to do that take sound judgment. Why not hate disease germs or any other natural enemy?"

His voice hardened. "They don't kill for the pure love of evil. They're intelligent beings, doing what they believe *has* to be done. I think they're wrong, and I can't understand them—though I wish I could. I consider poisoning bedbugs a wise move, though no intelligent bedbug would agree with me. This expedition of theirs would be a major job for any race, and they're going at it just as we would—if we had to exterminate the boll weevil.

"Emotions haven't a thing to do with it. We're in a battle for raw survival, and we haven't the time to indulge our animal emotions. It's a scientific problem that has to be solved for our lives—like a plague."

Norden added another intangible to the puzzle—either Miles was setting a trap for him, or it was hard to understand how he'd gotten the five stars on his insignia. An enemy was an enemy! He decided on silence as the best course, and was glad when the others began to leave. He watched them moving out, shocked again at the pretense that was going on. Did they really think war to the death was a game?

He started to follow, then hesitated, swayed by a sudden impulse. Surely it could do no harm. He located one of the waiters and asked for a package of food to take to Pat. To his relief, the man showed no surprise, and he soon had a bag in his hand.

Pat was still sitting at the machine. She took the food with a pleased smile that told him he'd done the right thing. "Why so glum?" she asked.

"Frankly, I'm puzzled," he told her. On a sudden impulse, he mentioned the lecture and how it had disturbed him.

"Dad!" She smiled, then laughed outright. "He always talks like that to a new man. Bill, did you ever see a little boy fighting a bigger one, wading in, crying, whimpering, but so mad

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he couldn't stop—couldn't even see where he was hitting? That's hate-fighting. And it's senseless, because the other side may be just as right. Professional fighters don't really hate—they simply do everything they can to win, coldly and scientifically."

She touched his arm. "Bill, be sensible. You act as if we *couldn't* win."

"What makes you think we can?"

"The computer thinks so. I tried it. We'll win because we know how to be efficient. We'll experiment a bit, because we don't have a set pattern—because we've kept individuality. The Aliens act like a preset machine. Like a crew killing pests.

"Start at the outside of a circle and exterminate inwards! Nonsense! They should have hit Earth at once, even if they had to retrace their steps a few times. But they aren't trying to find out whether we act like the enemy they planned on. No—what's the proper way is the proper way. A lot of our nations attempted that once—and look where they are now."

He shook his head, not believing her, but it left him uncertain and disturbed. The fact was that the enemy was closing the net—closing it so fast he'd be a dead man in two weeks, if he couldn't find the solution. As to hatred . . .

He shook his head, and went into his office. There were copies of his own published works there, as well as magazines he hadn't yet seen. He dropped down to fill in the flaws his memory had developed.

Paraphysics was tricky stuff. For a long time men had known no other spectrum but the electromagnetic, running from heat up through cosmic rays. When atomic particles moved from one energy level to another, they produced quanta of energy in that spectrum, which was limited to the speed of light.

The kinetogravitic spectrum began with gravity and moved up through nuclear binding force toward some unknown band. Apparently it was the product of the behavior of some sub-particle finer than any known, and its speed of propagation was practically infinite. Other spectra were being considered, but no order or logic had fitted yet.

He found an article by a Japanese scientist that suggested there might be a spectrum related to the behavior of atoms in the molecule—with crystals in some cases acting on one level due to the electron drift, and on another due to atomic strains within the molecule. Colloids, polymers and even the encephalograph waves were dragged in, but the mathematics seemed sound enough.

Norden caught his breath, and began digging into the equation. The third manipulation suggested that magnetism might somehow be

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involved, and that would mean . . .

He couldn't dig the idea out. Just when it seemed about to open before him, his mind shied away and drifted off to other things. He was still working on it when Pat came in, and dropped a sheaf of papers on the table. Strips of tape had been pasted together to form a crude book.

"The whole thing," she reported. "But most of it's nonsense. There's a page or two about some secret asteroid where the survivors of the fifth planet are waiting for men to mature before bringing the Great Millenium—or pages where Hardwick worked on the numerology of your name before he discovered your middle name had no H in it—or little notes to himself about buying a gross of Martian sand lizards. I had the machine go through it, strike out all meaningless matter, and come up with this."

It was a clip of five sheets. Norden skimmed through them, and groaned. The shield he had tested for Hardwick had been made of genuine mummy cloth, ground mandrake and a glue filled with bat blood.

"Yet you *did* live," Pat pointed out. "And he was right about their being able to detect life. We sent out sterile neoprene balloons loaded with live rabbits, and others with dead rabbits. Every balloon with the live rabbits was blasted—and none with the dead animals. We could use the same test to find out whether any one of those things worked—or any combination of them."

"We'll have to," he decided. "And then it may have been the closet instead of the shield—or an accident to their detector that saved me. Pat, have they got some kind of library here?"

It was already quitting time, but she went with him while he persuaded the library attendant to let him in, before the next shift came on. Mummy cloth, it seemed, might become infused with a number of aromatic preservatives, products from the mummy, and such.

It was ridiculous—but hardly more ridiculous than using the byproducts of mold to cure disease must have seemed. Anything dealing with life was slightly implausible. And when he phoned in the order for the materials to Miles, there were no questions.

"Thanks, Pat," he told her after she'd shown him where his sleeping quarters were located.

She shrugged. "Why? If we *don't* find the answer, I'll be as dead as you in a few weeks."

He shuddered, and then put it out of his mind. Worrying about death wasn't decent, somehow. He found his bunk, stretched out with his hands behind his neck, and tried to review the serious events of the day, without the problem of hatred, over-efficiency, or Pat and her father. He saved those to worry about in his mind

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after he rolled over on his side, and gave up all ideas of sleeping.

Then abruptly there was a yell from down the hall, and lights snapped on. Norden sprang out with the others, to see the outer lock click shut. In the glare of the overhead lights, he could see a figure running desperately for the edge of a further Quonset—running in the airlessness of the exposed surface without a space-suit!

More lights snapped on, and a guard in a suit came around the corner, throwing up a rifle. There was a tiny spurt of flame from the weapon, and the running man pitched forward. The guard started toward him just as a few men began to dart out of the huts in hastily-donned space-suits.

A greenish-yellow effulgence bloomed shockingly where the runner had fallen, and the floor shook under Norden. The guard was thrown backwards, and the others stumbled. When the explosion was over there was no sign of the man who had run.

"Alien!" somebody muttered. "A damned Alien! They always blow up like that before you can get near them! I've seen it out in space!"

And Norden remembered the bomb that had wrecked the dome on the asteroid—a bomb that had flared up with the same greenish-yellow color.

Guards came up to drive the men back to their huts, but Norden seemed to have high enough rating to stay for a while. He learned that one of the workers was missing, and that it had been his badge which the Alien had worn to enter the sleeping sections. Either the Alien had killed and destroyed the worker for his clothing or else he had been the worker!

And he had been discovered forcing the lock on the sub-section of the hut where Norden had been sleeping!

III

The invasion of the base by the Alien had shocked them all, and few people had slept during the night. On his way to breakfast, Norden could feel the attention that was riveted on him. To the others, he was probably one of the most likely targets for whatever attack had been intended. He'd wondered about it himself, sick with a feeling of close disaster; but he could find no logical basis for the fear.

Miles waited until they had finished with their food, his own face a study in grim anxiety. Then he stood up, and faced them. "No work this morning," he announced. "There's going to be a fluoroscopic test of every person on the base!"

Norden felt a wrench at his mind that left his thoughts spinning. He caught himself, just as he heard a gasp from Armsworth, a few places down. But Miles

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went on as if nothing had happened.

"The guards have already been checked. They'll lead us all down to the explosive test chamber. We'll go in, one at a time, and stand on a marked square. The fluoroscope results will show on a television screen visible to all of us. If you pass, you'll go across the chamber to the cleared rooms beyond.

"Any man resisting or proven non-human will be shot at once. The Alien last night *looked* human, but he didn't breathe oxygen, so his internal structure must be different. However, if anyone wants to declare that he's an Alien, he'll be treated as a prisoner of war instead of a spy."

Nobody made such a declaration, and Miles nodded to the guards who had filed in, while fear-ridden faces were still staring at their neighbors. Norden wondered how long a confessed Alien would last before the men tore him to bits. Discounting hate was fine at long range—but not when the danger was at your elbow.

Miles and Pat went into the chamber first, with the expected result—human skeletons and shadowy organs showing up on the screen. Norden stared in fascination, while fear built up tensions inside him.

Armsworth passed in and found his position, with a face that was somehow both taut and frozen. The guards took a look at the screen and waved him on. He half staggered to the exit, his features distorted with an emotion that was unreadable.

Norden tried to fight down his own panic. Surely it would be madness to doubt the outcome. But a doubt began to throb in his mind. He could remember so little. He'd thought the Aliens had never found him. But if they had actually captured him, tampered with his mind, and turned him back again, would he know it? Suppose he was an Alien—one given a spurious, hypnotic belief he was Norden until the right signal to become himself again . . .

It was ridiculous, absurd! But the speculations ran on in his tormented mind. He didn't belong here. Men apparently took it for granted that a confessed spy could keep his life—and Norden took it equally for granted that death was the only answer. He didn't think like the rest of them. There had been that week on the asteroid. His memories were spotty . . .

"Dr. William Norden!" the speaker announced.

He shuddered convulsively. Then he caught himself, and forced his reluctant legs to move. The door shut behind him, and ahead lay the white square on which he was to stand. He approached the spot automatically, bracing himself to face straight ahead toward the fluoroscopic screen.

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Now! It was almost a physical voice in his head. And his mind seemed to shift, to shout something down. *Not yet! Look!*

"Okay, Dr. Norden," the speaker said. His eyes flicked to the screen where a human skeleton showed dimly.

Crazy, he told himself. Hag-ridden with fears no sane human mind could have endured and retained its sanity. No wonder the psychologists had been uncertain about him. Unbalanced—but human!

Pat smiled weakly at him as he entered the room beyond, to join the ranks of the elect. Then they watched as their group passed successfully, to give place to a number of rocket men from the freight gang.

The sixth rocket man came through the door boldly enough—and suddenly leaped toward the side of the chamber where another door was. His hands were jolting at the locked barrier when the rifles sounded. A violent blast of greenish-yellow explosion rocked the chamber and shook the floors beyond. When it cleared, the Alien was dust and vapor, with nothing that could be studied for evidence.

Two workers who had been standing in line in a building beyond broke through the seal together, without waiting their turn, and headed with desperate haste for the shelter of a nearby barracks. A rifle bullet tore into one, and both exploded instantly.

By the time the rest had been proved safe in a testing ordeal as grim as death, it was the hour for lunch—a shocked, silent interlude at first. Then one of the men caught sight of a neighbor busily shaking his fork, and glancing sideways to emphasize some point. A tiny gadget appeared, and was concealed quickly under the steak on the man's plate. Ten seconds later, when the man cut into the meat, there was a cowlike bellow and the meat leaped six inches up, and two feet sideways. There was a shout of laughter that grew into a roar, and everything was suddenly normal again.

Norden shook his head. The incident appeared grotesque to him. Fluoroscope or not, something was wrong with him. He couldn't have been so different from other men before the ordeal on Hardwick's asteroid. That ruined steak had cost a small fortune to transport from Earth, and the man would lose valuable time while waiting for another to be cooked. And yet, Norden could see that somehow it had been effective therapy, had relieved an almost intolerable tension.

They spent the afternoon sending out the test "balloon" rockets with the various elements of Hardwick's screen. On the way back to the barracks, Norden noticed there were now six guards stationed about the laboratory,

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two of whom instantly fell into step behind him. He had been shifted to the dormitory over the Headquarters building, where he would be in the least danger—and also have the least freedom from observation!

But he forgot it the next day as the results of the tests came in. The shields had been completely ineffective. Dead rabbits still were unmolested, but live ones had been picked off in everything they had sent out.

Miles accepted the result with a despairing shrug, but Pat was hit hard by it. None of the other research teams seemed to be getting anywhere. There was no way to detect Aliens, and no way to screen humans.

On the fourth day, when the last possible variation of Hardwick's formula had proved useless, and the Aliens had moved their lines up to fifty million miles from Earth's orbit, Pat was down early, re-checking the translation the computer had made. Norden came in, saw the results, and swore.

For three hours, he pored over the Japanese scientist's mathematics—and as before, he found his mind reaching for something, only to begin some useless side speculation that threw him off. It was as if he had a censor in his mind telling him he could go no further. He considered the grim prospect of ten days or more of life for himself, and the men here, until the noonday signal sounded.

Somebody had put a new plastic glue on the handle of his knife and fork, and it was fifteen minutes before he could locate a solvent that removed it. Pat laughed at his plight along with the others. He checked his anger, swallowed it—and suddenly realized that in a strange way, the practical jest played on him was a mark of acceptance.

He went back to the laboratory trying to think of something ingenious enough to enable him to live up to their queer code. An idea that had nagged him tantalizingly, just below consciousness, nibbled again at his mind, but he let it go. If he could fit a protogravity generator under a plate . . .

And abruptly, he was digging for the complete set of Hardwick's notes, and scanning the nonsense that the computer had declared meaningless. He picked up the telephone and called the library. "Give me what you've got on Martian sand lizards!"

Most of it was useless. They were typical low-grade Martian life, tiny things covered with fur, but vaguely lizard-like. Then the significant part came. "The females demonstrate a remarkable ability to locate the rare males at extreme distances. Janiekowski found that a female with all sense organs removed could locate a male at a distance of five kilometers, even when the male was

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enclosed in an airtight box of laminated copper and soundboard. No satisfactory explanation is known."

It *had* to be some form of telepathy or sensitivity to the life forces of the male lizards! He went over the work done with the creatures a dozen times, and could find no other explanation. And suddenly his mind was milling about, trying to slide away from it again.

"Taboo!" he muttered. *"Damn* the taboo!" It was too late for a taboo to interfere now, whatever the reasons behind it. And fortified by his growing certainty that something had been done to him, it only served to confirm the fact that he was on the right track at last.

Pat listened to his summary of what he'd found, and nodded hopeful agreement. "A quick test! It's what we need, all right. We still may not find the insulator for the shield, but we can run tests fast enough to have a chance. Metals first, then the other broad classifications, until something vital turns up. Bill, I guess this makes me, and the computer look pretty silly. And after all the yelling I've done about flexibility being needed, too. I hope some zoo or laboratory on Earth has a collection of the little beasts."

It turned out that Harvard was well stocked as a result of a research plan to rework Janiekowski's experiments. In less than five hours, twelve females and two rare males were lying in front of Norden. They looked like small lizards covered with chinchilla hair, and possessing eight legs apiece. The females, with scant modesty, were trying busily to break down the wall that kept them from the males.

Pat had already installed three television pickups and cages at various distant points, doing the work herself to insure secrecy, and picking places most difficult to break into. Now she came back to move the females to their new homes, where they immediately began trying to crawl toward the torpid males, as shown by the television screens. The walls of their cages were equipped with pressure, measuring devices to test the strength of their efforts.

The mummy cloth drew a complete blank, as did the bat's blood. But the ground mandrake set the males to pawing at their cake with their triple tongues out, trying to reach it, while the distant females went berserk.

Pat took the stuff away, snorting at them. "They'll die of frustration in another minute. To them an active male seems to be a combination billionaire, video star, and accomplished Cassanova in the art of love. I guess I know how they feel."

He was getting better at reading her glances, and he frowned as her eyes rested upon him. He

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liked Pat, but sometimes she—

She laughed. "Forget it, Bill. I was only ribbing you. You have about as much romantic appeal to me as my grandfather."

It was ten minutes later before he realized what a typical masculine *human* reaction to such a remark would have been. He frowned, while his mind chilled at the implications. How could he doubt any longer that the Aliens had caught him and done something to him—something drastic? He wasn't quite human, despite what the bones of his body had seemed to confirm.

And that could only mean that Hardwick's shield had never worked. He stopped short, and then reconsidered. The difficulty he had forcing his mind to think about tests for the lizards still spelled a taboo in his mind—and that indicated there might be a shield. It left him exactly where he was, except for the problem of what the Aliens wanted. If he could solve that, and defeat it . . .

Nothing they tried gave any positive result, though Pat thought that the variation in the female activity had been slightly more than normal when they'd tried the potassium salt solution around the males. They gave up late, and Norden went back to his bunk, and to the familiar pattern of lulling himself into a semi-conscious condition by the ritual of reviewing the day with his hands locked behind his head.

Then he swore. It was a pointless habit. He returned his arms to his side and held them rigid, while his head squirmed unpleasantly. Habits could be broken—and any compulsion he had as a result of whatever had happened to him was a luxury he couldn't permit himself.

There would be no recovery until he had overcome the taboos and filled all the gaps in his mind with useful things. Perhaps the Aliens had already succeeded. They might have decided somehow that he was the only man who *could* solve the problem, and had tampered just enough to make sure he'd fail, while keeping him competent enough to insure that no other man would replace him.

He yanked his arms down again, and started to turn over. Fifteen minutes later, he came out of a complete blackout with his hands at the back of his neck again and a queer feeling that his mind had remained active, with only his memory of its activities missing. His glance darted to the door, but it was still locked, and his clothes lay on the floor where he'd kicked them.

Apparently he hadn't moved from the bed while he'd been short-circuited from his memory, at least.

He thrust himself up from the bed in disgust, pulled on his clothes, and headed down the hall, back towards the laboratory. He passed the cubicle where Gen-

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eral Miles should have been sleeping and noticed a trace of light shining under the door. For a second, he remembered the man's words—a spy who confessed would be treated as an honorable prisoner of war.

Only damn it, he wasn't a spy, whatever else he might be. And there was no time left to find someone else to solve the problem that had been dumped into his lap. He couldn't turn himself in while that problem remained a race with death.

Inside his mind was a slowly growing hatred of the Aliens, and he clung to it tenaciously. They'd denied him his right to be a normal human being—and while their imposed attitudes made it impossible for him to understand the absurd conduct of men, he was beginning to realize that the fault lay with him, and not with the rest of humanity. It was not a pleasant thought.

Fresh guards had replaced the original pair. They swung in behind him, and then stopped at the entrance of the laboratory. He'd insisted that they stay outside, since he wanted no one to watch his experiments with the lizards. Complete ignorance of events was the only sure protection against spies.

He headed around the computer by letting his feet guide him, and reached for the switch. It clicked, just as a voice sounded in front of him.

"Norden, you damned fool! Leave those lights off!"

But they were already on, showing the tall, unmoving figure of Armsworth standing before the cage of the lizards with a knife in his hand.

IV

Norden felt a wave of hate boil up in him, and made no attempt to check it. As he returned Armsworth's stare his mind reacted to the situation before he could realize more than a few of the implications.

Obviously, Armsworth was a spy who knew of the work here, and had come to wreck it. With his rank, it would be easy enough for him to get in. Also, the man stood there with none of the fear he should have shown on being discovered, and Norden felt the sick confirmation of his being a pawn for the Aliens.

But the fact itself gave him some chance. He lifted his arm to the switch, and then dropped it. "The guards would suspect something if I cut it off now," he admitted candidly. "Any suggestions?"

"I could kill the lizards, let you discover me, and chase me out to explode," Armsworth said thoughtfully, without any emotional color to the suggestion. He shook his head.

"I don't know. It's funny they can't trust you to stall off the Miles girl and have to send me

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here. With replacements scarce, I'd hate to blow up unless it's absolutely necessary."

Then his eyes narrowed in incredulous alarm. "Wait a minute. You weren't supposed to know my identity."

Norden's hand swept up, hit the light switch. His other arm jerked out for the big tongs he had noticed. He heard the spy leap, and recoiled just in time to avoid the rush. His arm came down with the instrument, and there was a solid thud. When he turned the lights on again, Armsworth lay on the floor with a gash across his head an inch deep.

For a moment Norden was only aware of his own harsh breathing. Then, slowly and horribly, the corpse sat up and began hitching along the floor toward the cage of lizards.

Norden bent, picked up the little cage and swung towards the door. He took one step forward, stopped abruptly, and bent again. His hand gripped the collar of the thing on the floor and, straightening, he heaved it up against the light gravity of the Moon.

The thing sailed across the laboratory, heading toward the rear of the heavy protogravity generator. Norden cushioned the cage of lizards against his chest and dropped to the floor in the shelter of the computer.

There was a blast that nearly ruptured his eardrums and the accompanying glare of greenish-yellow light burned through his eyelids into his brain. The floor heaved and shook, while sections of the curved roof began falling. The air gushed upwards, and the floor jarred again as the automatic airseal dropped, cutting off other sections.

Norden jumped toward a plainly market closet, and threw it open. He yanked down one of the spacesuits stored there for emergency purposes, thrust the lizard cage inside, closed it, and turned on the oxygen.

Adapted to the thin air of Mars, it seemed likely the animals would remain alive. He groped about until he located another suit that would fit, cursed as he found it zippered closed, and finally worked it open. Once in, he sealed it, and headed toward the personnel lock on the big emergency airseal.

He got through just as the guards were about to enter in their own spacesuits, dragging rescue equipment. Miles was with them, waiting impatiently while Norden slipped his helmet off. "Who was it?" he demanded.

"Armsworth," Norden told him. "After he passed the fluoroscope test!"

Miles sighed, but there was no surprise. "Damn! I should have had him checked when he came back from inspecting the other side. They must have had a spy all ready to make the switch as soon as they got him. Or maybe

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the test doesn't mean anything."

The guards had come back. One of them began to report on what they had seen. Most of the damage had been confined to the roof of the building, and to the big protogravity generator, which apparently had shielded the rest of the equipment.

Norden and Pat, who had finally been called, went inside in their suits to supervise clearing away the debris. Outside, a crew was already erecting a new roof on the laboratory, using prefab sheets. Aside from the generator they had never used, nothing irreplaceable had been hurt. And the two little male lizards were doing well enough. Inside of two hours the laboratory was back in full operation.

By common consent, Pat and Norden abandoned all idea of sleeping. Norden started to draw up a list of new tests, and then went back to the potassium shield. It seemed to produce a very slight quantitative difference in the reaction of the females. He consulted the vague speculations in his own works on possible other spectra, and came back.

The trouble was that he wasn't working with any natural phenomenon, but with life. He grimaced at the twist of his logic, but the sense remained. Something came into the back of his mind from a phrase in Hardwick's notes. It teased him, until his mind almost had it, and then another taboo clamped down on his thoughts.

He fought it out, standing still while Pat stared at him doubtfully. Twice he could feel himself almost black out, but he tracked the taboo down in his mind, pursued it into its lair, and strangled it. It died hard, but left his answer available.

"K-40," he said. His voice was steady, and Pat relaxed, unable to see the complete fatigue inside him. Disciplining himself seemed to be the hardest possible task. "Radioactive potassium isotope. It's supposed to be mixed up somehow with the life processes. Some scientists claim it's essential to life."

She reached for the phone, and spoke into it briefly. Then there was a wait, before she handed it over, and a voice came on. "This is General Dawes at Oak Ridge. Who's calling?"

"William Norden, Project A-sub-zero, Moon Base. I want five pounds of K-40 up here in four hours. Use my top priority and mark the shipment for delivery to me only."

There was the usual few seconds of waiting while the message traveled to Earth, and back. "Five *pounds?*" the voice asked, incredulously.

"Five pounds! And I may want more as fast as it can be gathered."

Pat was on another phone. Before Earth could answer again,

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there was a click, and General Miles' voice broke in sharply. "This is Miles, Dawes. *Give Norden what he wants.*"

A sputter of protest began, but it ended abruptly as Miles' voice reached Earth. The silence was broken by a sigh. "Okay, Norden, we'll get it to you in four hours somehow."

It arrived in less time, and Norden and Pat began the tricky job of getting the highly active elements into a container which was both chemically and radioactively safe. They clamped it over the cage at last, and watched the pressure on the female cages.

The results weren't spectacular, but they were unquestionable. And later, when they had reduced the amount of K-40 to a thin coating, it still worked. The quantity of potassium made very little difference beyond a certain minimum.

The effects still weren't good enough. They tried painting various substances with the chloride of the potassium, with equally good results and much greater ease of handling. The nitrate was even better to work with.

But it took them until late that night before they learned that coating the nitrate over cleaned iron was a major step forward. Until then it had been all hit and miss, except for vague directional hunches.

Norden looked at Pat, who seemed ready to drop. "Better go back for some rest," he suggested. She shook her head, but did agree to lie down while he began rechecking their results to date. Their best efforts had quieted the excitement of the females by no more than ten percent.

He reduced everything he could to a consistent basis, and added other formulae which might apply from the incomplete relationship tables that strove to reconcile the two recognized spectra. Those might also indicate something about any third spectrum. Either his memory was coming back or his reading of the books and articles was beginning to take effect, he was pleased to notice.

Pat worked the computer, which had fortunately suffered only minor damages, and had been repaired. From the computations, they made the indicated experiments, and fed the results into the machine. This time, it gave only seven suggested answers, with a rough weighing of them. The second one called for one of several organic substances soaked in potassium ferrocyanide and grounded.

While they waited for the chemistry shed to handle that with due precautions on the radioactive isotope, they tried the others. One gave a better than fifty percent reduction, which meant that the females were only mildly crazy.

"Don't they ever relax?" Pat

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wondered, unwrapping one of the sandwiches Miles had ordered sent in to them.

The female sand lizard's libido mattered less than nothing to Norden at the moment. He was staring at the work he had done in relating hints and fragments of information with pure hunches to get new facts, and realizing that he could never have done that, even before the Aliens had tampered with him. Either he was mysteriously more capable, now that he'd managed to overcome a few of the taboos in his mind, or else the loss of so much of his memory had left his thoughts freer to operate.

"We'll call this the Hardwick spectrum," he decided aloud. "The man was a crackpot cultist, but he was a genius, all the same. And with this, we'll pay those damned Aliens back for what they did to him."

"We wouldn't be able to if you hadn't had time to get the males and yourself into oxygen suits before Armsworth exploded," Pat told him. "They're the only males left alive, now that Mars has been scoured by the Aliens."

He swung around in surprise. "I never. . . ."

The phone saved him from finishing. He hadn't had time to get into a space suit immediately. After the blast he had fumbled around searching for one. And he'd arrived outside the lock without ever having felt discomfort from living in a vacuum for *five full minutes!*

His self-satisfaction vanished, and revulsion took its place. He stared at his body in horror. No human body could have endured such punishment. But he had taken it without noticing it!

Pat came back at a run. "Come on, Bill. A messenger just arrived from Earth with five hundred pounds of K-40!"

"Five hundred?" Norden could almost hear again the amazed voice of General Dawes when he asked for a mere five pounds—a quantity nearly impossible to secure.

Pat's face confirmed his suspicions. Earth couldn't have made five hundred pounds so rapidly.

They found the guards already waiting to take them to where Miles was, and followed them down to the entrance of the explosion testing chamber. Miles was smiling and chatting with a man who appeared to be a perfectly normal rocket pilot, and who seemed bored until he saw Norden. He consulted a picture on some kind of tape recording and stepped forward.

"I have orders to deliver the K-40 to you, Dr. Norden," the pilot said. "But it's pretty bulky in its containers. If you'll come out to the ship and okay it. . . ."

Miles cut in blandly. "I've been explaining the new regulations, Dr. Norden." He winked slightly,

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with a faint motion toward the chamber.

"Go ahead and clear through," Norden told the pilot. "I'll wait, and then we can look at your cargo. It's a damned nuisance having to hold things up while everyone is X-rayed. But we've new regulations now." He caught Miles' look of approval, and he knew he'd reacted correctly.

The pilot shrugged. "Why not? Let me know if you find any dangerous diseases." He chuckled, and stepped through the entrance, and out toward the fluoroscope set-up.

The picture on the screen was satisfactory and the guards started to relax beside the slits where their guns projected into the chamber. Miles glanced at them, and his voice was urgent, commanding. *"Shoot to miss. And keep getting closer."*

Another screen showed the pilot turning to leave, just as the first bullet splintered the floor a yard from his boots. He jumped back with a terrified gesture. Another bullet came closer, and a third barely missed him. Shock hit his face, and vanished as he turned into a bright splash of greenish-yellow light.

"They over-estimated our production and under-estimated our ability to bluff," Miles said. "Good shooting, men. I'm glad he decided he'd failed the test before you had to shave it closer."

Norden stood staring at the blasted area and back toward the screen that had shown the image of a normal human standing before a fluoroscope. Breathing vacuum for five minutes hadn't hit him as hard. Subconsciously, he'd counted on the fluoroscopic evidence—and it had proved to be a lie.

"He couldn't have been an Alien with that kind of a skeleton!" he whispered.

Miles shook his head. "He wasn't. As near as our cybernetics could gather, he was some kind of a robot, designed to mix with us. We left automatic televisors on Mars to catch a few telephotos of the Aliens, and they look a little like octopi on stubby legs. Nothing could make them look human."

"But a robot with a human skeleton?" Pat asked.

"It's possible, with enough advanced development. Hide the metal works in the so-called bones and skull, and shape everything else to the right form and transparency. Probably the first ones we caught were meant to mislead us. Hughes swears that any race capable of developing such an advanced cybernetic brain could handle the rest—down to letting him get his energy out of our food."

Miles' face was more fatigued than ever, but he found enough strength for a smile. "Thanks for playing along with me, Bill. Now get back to work, if you can stand

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it. The chem lab delivered your stuff while you were coming here."

The stuff from the chemists looked like wool, impregnated with the K-40 salt. Pat slashed off a yard of the coarse cloth and draped it around the cage, after a quick check with the Geiger-Mueller counter. She formed a rope of it and connected the cage-cover to the nearest pipe.

And the images of the females in the screens were suddenly still, as if all of them had gone to sleep at once. Pat yanked the cover off and instantly the females were dashing at the gates of their cages again.

Pat let out a yell and reached for the phone. Norden tried to echo her enthusiasm, but there was no resiliency left in him. He stared at the answer to their problems, while part of his mind estimated that the pilots could stand the radioactivity from suits of such cloth long enough to accomplish their purpose, if an undersuit of lead-cloth could be worn also.

But the rest of his mind was in his own private hell. *Robot,* it shouted at him—*robot and spy!* It was plain enough now that his periods of "relaxation", and review of the day's events had been a mechanism for leaking information to the Aliens. His unexpected and rebellious attempt to end it had been the signal to send Armsworth against the male lizards. Hands-behind-the-head-Norden, he thought—the robot too dumb to recognize the working of an automatic transmitter switch.

He fondled the cloth cover slowly, tasting the anticipation of revenge. The Aliens had taken a man named William Jon Norden from a lonely asteroid, and had drained him of his life history and knowledge. They'd built a poor dupe of a robot, and had sent it out to spy for them, and to believe for a while that it was human and alive. Now let them feel the defeat they'd earned when they built their robot too close to the original.

Then he considered the thin thread on which his hopes rested. He had something that stopped some form of energy from being detected by the lizards—an unknown band-width of an unknown spectrum which might not even be the right one.

He swung around to check Pat's call, but it was too late. The word had already spread, judging by the whoops or rejoicing coming from beyond the laboratory.

V

Norden broke away from the men who refused to listen to his warnings as quickly as possible. Pat had already gone to her bunk, worn out completely by the brief burst of hope, and he headed for his own cubicle. There was no physical fatigue—how could there be in a robot? But his mind was

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dulled with too many shocks. He dropped to the bunk, and his arms came up automatically.

He forced them down, and this time he was ready when his brain tried to black out on him. The compulsions that acted on him to make him pass on his information to the Aliens were partly under his control.

He managed to sidetrack his thoughts before blacking out, and to keep his arms down. He lay there, cursing himself and the things which had created him, fighting his battle silently, until he knew he had won.

His legs were unsteady when he finally stood up. The effort of will had shocked even his motor control impulses, but the damage was not permanent, and by the time he passed Miles' darkened doorway, he was moving smoothly enough again. He saw surprised looks exchanged by his guards as they followed him back to the laboratory.

"You might as well come in," he told them. "I'll be here all night, and there's nothing secret about my work now. I think there's a deck of cards in the desk over there."

One of them looked and came back, holding the deck and grinning. "Thanks, Doc," he said. "You're all right."

For a second, Norden experienced a warming glow as he turned into his office. He could find some acceptance among men now. Then he grimaced bitterly, as he realized what they'd think of him if they knew the truth about him. It was one thing to ape humanity, quite another to belong.

The article on speculative spectra by the Japanese scientist was still on his desk, and he began poring over it. Almost at once, his mind swerved away on a flight of curiosity about the card game the men had been playing. He pulled it back, and his imagination started in on hatred of the Aliens.

He fought against that too, tempting as it was. He'd licked the compulsion to communicate with them in two hours. There was hope that he could lick the taboo against investigating into a forbidden field. The fact that it was forbidden made it doubly worth studying.

Bit by bit he traced down the mathematics, but in the end the taboo threw him. It required all the effort he could bring to the problem to follow the tricky formulea, and it couldn't be done while fighting the treachery of his own mind. He gave up in disgust, and turned to the computer.

He'd seen Pat use it often enough, and apparently his robot mind was good at memorizing. He searched through the available tapes of information until he came to one that covered the more vital aspects of Einstein's unified field theory.

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He fed it in, and began adding the spectra relation data from the books, carefully storing them in the memory circuits of the machine. The mathematics of the article went in next. He made sure the material they had used to locate the screen was still active, and brought it up to date.

Finally he set the machine to deriving all possible extensions of the mathematics he couldn't handle himself.

When that was finished, there was no longer any need to worry about the taboo. The computer had done what he had failed to do, and more. He stared at the sheaf of papers. The assembled material would save years of work on extraspectral radiation. And his suspicion that magnetism was the vital link seemed to be confirmed. It appeared to be something of a universal transformer, when properly handled.

But the machine couldn't tell him what section of the Hardwick spectrum involved life. The field used by the lizards to locate each other lay well up in it, in a band relationship somewhat analogous to the X-rays of the normal spectrum. But if that failed, there was no clue to what might work.

In any new field, one fresh fact could open up tremendous stores of knowledge—but there would always be even greater ones awaiting discovery.

He put in a call to the library for more material on Janiekowski's work with the lizards, and was told that they'd have to secure a tape from Earth. Earth promised a ship with the tape, and other material he'd requested within three hours. There was no questioning of his priorities this time.

Then he glanced at the clock, and was shocked to find it already past noon. He got up impatiently, heading toward the lunch room. It was strange that Pat had failed to join him.

He found her and Miles searching for him in the cafeteria, and one look was enough. Miles motioned Norden to follow him, and led the way to his office. Once there, he close the door, and threw the decoded dispatches down for Norden to see.

"The Aliens have narrowed the invasion area to ten million miles from Earth," he said wearily. "We've been holding out by a clever tactical subterfuge. Send out a hundred ships near each other, and the Aliens can't handle them all at once. If we're lucky, and spot the first torpedoes, we can trace them back and a few ships may survive long enough to send visual, pattern-seeking atomic torpedoes toward the Alien ship.

"But we can't get closer than a few hundred thousand miles with any life aboard a ship, because the radiation—or whatever it is they use—is fatal so long as they can detect us. You can see why

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Command rushed through all the screen suits they could, and struck this morning. They had to."

Norden picked up the dispatches, and scanned them grimly. Seven hundred pilots out of twice that many thousand had been screened. A third of the total number had returned—but none of the spared ships had been theoretically protected.

The Aliens had apparently not only spotted all of the protected ships, but had concentrated their torpedo fire on them. The experiment was a complete failure!

There was no use in reminding Miles that he'd tried to warn him. Earth hadn't been able to heed such warnings. He handed the papers back, his mind tormented by a picture of seven hundred men—men probably like the guards who'd called him all right—who had lost their marginal chance to live because a robot had failed. It was nonsense, his mind told him. Soldiers were meant to die. But the picture remained.

"So what happens to me now?" he asked.

"You'll try again, of course," Miles answered, apparently surprised at the question. "At least the fact that they worked that hard to eliminate the ships with the screen indicates you're on the right track."

Norden stared at him despairfully. "It's like tracing a single drop of water in the ocean—or looking for a trace of life that can be detected for millions of miles when you're in the middle of hordes of living creatures. I've been working on that already. And the only reason we *could* detect and screen the lizzard signals was because they were unique.

Hardwick was right about that, too. You have to look for life forces where they're scarce. I need isolation from people, animals—even from germs and viruses, probably."

Pat gestured to a map on the wall. "There are the mine installations on the other side of the Moon. Would they do?"

He had no idea, but it was the best he could hope for. He nodded slowly, and she turned towards the door.

"Then what are we waiting for?" she asked. "We've got too little time now."

"You're not going, Pat," he told her. "Nobody is. I need isolation from life, remember! Besides, if there's any means of communication between here and there, I'll need you here to work the communicator."

There was a television link that was still useful, as a quick check showed. And there were ships to carry as much equipment as he needed, including two rabbits, and a male and female sand lizard in little airtight cages where oxygen could be supplied from tanks. He had no idea of what he might

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need, and had to take everything he could imagine as being useful.

VI

Three hours later, he stood alone in the building that had served as a barracks for a mine crew. He watched the rockets leave, and began opening the air-locks to space. Any bacteria left by the former men would quickly perish, he felt sure. But he had to be thorough.

He had no hope of success yet. He might be keeping a death watch over the human race as the Aliens moved in—or a life watch, since he was seeking life while they were intent on ending it. But he, at least, was no living thing, and the life detectors of the Aliens should miss him. Somehow, he'd learn enough to seek vengeance among them.

They'd made a mistake in creating him with all the ability of the original William Norden, and the thinking speed of a robot. They'd made a bigger mistake in assuming that a robot was only a robot, and that orders in the form of compulsions would be followed without question.

For their mistakes, they'd pay. He had twenty-four hours out of each day for work, and, until they caught him, to learn their further weaknesses.

He flooded the front entrance, where the television link to Moon base stood, with air to make speech possible, and rigged up a flexible seal to the rest of the building.

Janiekowski had dissected countless sand lizards, and the pictures were included in the reel of tape from Earth. He studied them, digging into what the calculator had supplied about radiation, and its behavior in the third spectrum. He found, as he had expected, that a tiny bit of radio-active material lay at the base of the microscopic receptor in the female, and that a similar mechanism was to be found in the organ which the male used to generate the force.

There was a tiny helix of super-fine, wirelike construction around the radio-active material, but he had no idea of what the conductor was composed, or how the animals generated the faint currents of electricity they'd need. He was only sure the helix was a tiny electromagnet.

He built a model as best he could, and tried to find some indication that it picked up a signal form the male. Finally he was forced to anesthetize the female and remove her receptor for examination under the portable electron microscope.

It took eleven tries before he was able to detect anything of importance. Then the result surprised him. The faint, almost invisible glow from the radio-active disintegration in his device abruptly faded. He had been expecting it to increase, but what-

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ever force the male broadcast seemingly acted to decrease the "unchangeable" rate of decay of a bit of K-40.

He called Pat, asking for information. Her face was haggard with worry, and her anxiety to remain constantly vigilant and alert. She wrote down his questions, and cut off without wasting time. Half an hour later, she called back.

"You're right. Uranium-bearing ores from far out in space contain much less uranium in proportion to lead than similar ores on Earth. Geologists say it's because those space-borne rocks are older, and cosmic radiation acts on them more continuously."

They're wrong," he said flatly. "It's because radioactivity is inhibited by the life processes. I don't know how. But I do know I need that data fed into the computer."

It meant they'd have to revise all of their figures about the age of the Earth upwards. Since the beginning of life on Earth and Mars, no radioactive half-life had been natural. Probably the rate of decay had varied slightly with each century, as the amount of life changed.

He fed her a list of calculations, and waited while the machine ground out its answers. Pat came back to the screen while it worked on automatically.

"They're bombing the base now," she reported dully. "We've been able to miss being hit by keeping a cover of volunteers up to attract the seeking units before they reach us. And the Aliens are within three million miles. We can't hold out much longer."

"Don't forget your optimism," he said. He'd meant it for reassurance, but she stared back as if he'd slapped her. "I mean your computer calculations on victory for Earth. How come they moved in so quickly?"

"It's been three days," she told him. "Don't you know how long you've been out there?"

He hadn't kept track. The cluck of the computer ending its work interrupted them, and she held the results up to the screen for him to copy with the camera at his end.

He studied the formulae for long, wasted minutes before he could accept them. Then he went on to other work.

There was no shield possible for any object bigger than about twice the size of the cage they had used. There could never be any way to protect a man from the Aliens.

It was to be a death watch he kept, apparently. And Pat must have known it when she saw the formulae, since she had picked up sufficient basic knowledge to read it.

He stood staring up at the space above him, letting the hate harden inside him, while he pictured the base in the hands of the invaders!

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Humans were beyond saving, according to the figures he had now. But it was still not too late for vengeance.

This time he deliberately sought for a taboo in his mind to discourage thought along hindering lines. The forbidden topic was the question of why the Aliens had to exterminate life as they advanced. He wrestled with it briefly, rejoicing in the knowledge that he seemed to be gaining ease in overcoming the compulsory behavior which had been imposed on him.

Life must be poison to the Aliens! Probably it was for that reason that they had been able to detect it in the first place. And they could never rest until it was wiped out to the last living cell. He glanced at his formulae again, and nodded. If their existence were somehow based on the breakdown of radioactive isotopes, and if protoplasmic life slowed up that process, then they *had* to exterminate it.

How? He asked it automatically, remembering the force they used to sterilize space before them. And that had an answer, too. Even protoplasmic life apparently needed a tiny, incredibly small amount of radioactivity to function. Blast enough of the raw life force against it, and all nuclear breakdown would stop—and with the stopping of that, there would be no life.

It was logical that the weapon of the Aliens should be the one thing which they themselves feared most.

Tiny—incredibly weak—as the energy of those life forces were, they could do more in their inhibiting of the great force of nuclear readjustment than ten million atomic bombs!

He drew up his plans this time with sureness. He was no longer amazed at the progress he'd made in understanding extraspectral phenomena. It might very well represent the work of generations of scientists, but he was a robot designed to understand human science, even from the few smatterings the Aliens had been able to learn before he had been created.

He finished the designs, wrote down the proper formulae, and stacked the paper in front of the television pick-up, pressing the call button. Without waiting for an answer, he went back into the workshop, and began assembling the tiny, radioactive strontium batteries and tubes of protein plastic, wound with layers of iron wire. He had enough for what he needed.

The device was set to work both as a detector and a generator of the radiation involved. He tuned one, seting it to receive. It took a few minutes to replace the antenna of the small radar set with the new device, and he forced himself to work faster by the sheer drive of his will.

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Then he stepped aside, letting mechanism revolve on the antenna mount. He began increasing the current that controlled the degree of electromagnetism in the wire which served to tune the device.

A pip appeared on the screen, pointing toward the cage where the male and crippled female lay peacefully together. Norden raised the frequency until another pip appeared, this time pointing to the rabbits. He adjusted it for maximum brightness. In the section which should cover the direction of Moon base below him, a brilliant glow sprang up, indicating radiation that cut straight through all the layers of the Moon. He adjusted the instrument again.

He found the exact frequency, and the whole screen suddenly blazed, blanked out by overloading of the amplifier. Apparently all life of terrestial origin radiated at the same frequency. He cranked up the control, expecting nothing more. Then he bent sharply forward as other pips appeared, indicating objects far out in space!

The Aliens also radiated in the same spectrum—but at such an incredibly high frequency that no atomic nucleus was small enough to be affected by the radiation.

As Norden watched, the central pip suddenly began to grow brighter, holding its position in a way that indicated a straight descent toward his detector! Terror struck at his nerves.

Obviously the Aliens had detectors for every frequency, and his detector was just crude enough to radiate a faint trace of its own. He'd been located, and the exterminating force was on the way.

VII

Norden cursed his own stupidity, and estimated the time it would take. If they decided to come in, and spray the area with their own force, or to capture it, he had several minutes. If they sent one of their superspeed torpedoes, he was on borrowed time. His mind raced furiously.

With a few minutes to spare, he could tune the tube he'd designed as a weapon, and spray them with that. Its straight-line efficiency would insure that no dangerous amount of its radiation would reach the men two thousand miles away. Vengeance was his for the taking.

He reached for the other tube, hesitated, and picked up a piece of paper and a pencil. The men at the base had the working plans of his device by now. They had to be warned how dangerous it would be not to make absolutely sure that their radiation generators and detectors couldn't spill dangerous radiation at random. Also that the Aliens could detect an inefficient search ray.

Norden headed for the flexible seal at a full run, while his steady

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hands pencilled the final information on the radiation frequencies needed. He broke through into the air of the entrance, yanked the diagrams off the pickup rack, and snapped in the new instructions. He turned with a single motion, and headed for the workroom again. And stopped!

Beyond the entrance, the gleaming fins of a rocket were visible. And the red light on the airlock indicated someone was coming through. As his eyes focussed, he saw the inner lock open, and Miles and Pat emerged in the red glare.

They started to shout something, but he cut them off. "For God's sake, stay here. There's no air beyond. Alien ship!"

He jumped through the seal. His hands swept up the tube that was to be a weapon, and his eyes darted to the screen. The pip was bigger now, and at maximum brightness. The Alien ship must be only tens of thousands of miles above, braking down to attack with deadly precision.

Less than a hundred feet away, the two humans waited, at the mercy of any energy that might spill from his weapon! He would have to score with a perfect piece of marksmanship, with all the radiation directed in a straight line.

The formulae of its propagation seemed like an endless belt in his mind. He tightened the helix of wire about the radio-active lode, trying to be sure they were even. With time, there were a number of things he might have done, but he had no time to spare. He might harm Miles and Pat—but the Alien beam would leave nothing to chance.

The thought of Miles and Pat jolted through his mind in a delayed reaction. They'd seen him come into this airless space without a helmet. They knew now he wasn't human! Discovered! *Explode the . . .*

"No!" he shouted silently into the airless room. He had to get the Alien first!

He had no idea how much time he had left as he snapped a flashlight battery into place, and tried to line the weapon into resonance with the detector settings. He lifted his eyes, to stare up through the open roof of the building. He knew there should be a faint black dot in the sky, but he couldn't see it against the blackness of space.

He lifted the weapon, pointed it toward where the Aliens should be, and depressed the little trigger, moving the rheostat back and forth to be sure he had the lethal frequency well covered.

He felt a tremor on the floor beside him, and his eyes caught a glimpse of Pat at his side before he could force his gaze toward space again. She was shouting something inside her helmet.

Then he caught the first visible sign of the Alien ship, already

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within miles of the building, and big enough to show in the sidelight of the sun. It came rushing down in an unchecked plunge, apparently heading straight for him! He strained his eyes, tracing its path. Then he relaxed. It was moving sideways and would land a mile away. *The weapon had worked.* No ship would have risked such speed so near the surface if the pilot had been alive.

He gripped Pat by the shoulder, and dragged her to the floor, away from the threat of falling debris. There was no sound, but a tremendous jolt rocked the floor of the building, and for a terror-fraught moment the ground seemed to dance madly. A shaft of greenish-yellow radiance merged with a glaring red that lit up the sky for miles. The ship had struck at a terrific speed—fast enough to reduce everything inside it to a pulp. The instant everything was quiet, Norden sprang to his feet.

Now! There is no time to be lost!

He caught the thought in time. He couldn't let himself explode in the workroom. He had to get outside, away from the two humans. The compulsion squeezed and writhed in his mind, and he could not throw it off. It was tenfold as strong as the previous commands—and the need to overcome it a hundred times as great.

He stumbled toward the seal as Pat stood by. His body slipped through the seal, and he almost bumped into Miles, who was apparently waiting for him. Norden had no spare effort for speech or thought. He headed dumbly for the airlock, determined to get outside as quickly as possible.

"Norden!" The general had grabbed his arm, and was following him. "Norden, if you go out there, I'm going with you. Whater happens will happen to me, too. *You've got to listen!*"

He tried to force his way ahead, shaking his arm to free it. The other arm was also carrying a dead weight, and he could see Pat's face close to his own.

She was screaming at him. "Bill! Bill, you must listen! We knew it all along! We *knew* you were a robot! It doesn't matter. If you explode, you'll take us with you!"

He hit the lock in savage desperation and the words froze meaninglessly in his ears as he held back the driving urge until he could escape from them.

Miles clung grimly. "It's the Aliens, Bill! They want you to explode. The damned Aliens who want to kill you! Do you love them so much you'll kill us all? Or do you hate them?"

Slowly it penetrated the red haze of torment in his mind. The Aliens wanted to kill him. They'd played with him, had turned him into a monster to do their malicious bidding. They'd given

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him nothing in return. And now they wanted everything. His own life, worthless though it might be —and the life of his friends.

The hate washed through him —the cold, hard hate that had a greater strength for its very lack of endocrine instability.

"I'm all right," he said slowly. "You're safe. You can go back to the base."

Miles stared at him with a warm and friendly understanding. "We really did know about you, Bill," he said. "That business about your being the only undetected human on the asteroid looked suspicious, and the psychologists weren't fooled. We were gambling on a chance to get some information on the Aliens' detector out of you before you could do anything dangerous.

"Hardwick was the only man who could have known enough to have any chance. With him dead, we had to hope they'd give you information enough to act in his place. Pat volunteered to watch you. And we had ultra-violet cameras in every room where you ever were, watching you every second."

He paused, but Norden could think of nothing to say. He looked at Pat for confirmation, and she nodded. "We set the whole thing up for you, Bill. But we found we were wrong. The Aliens had done too good a job on you for their own good. They made you too human—so human that you had to begin thinking *our* way. After that business with Armsworth, we stopped worrying."

"But you came out here . . ." he began.

"Not to spy on you, Bill," Miles told him. "Earth's evacuating the Moon, now that you found us weapons to handle the Aliens. We're needed to supervise things back at the factories. Pat and I just came to pick you up, when you wouldn't answer your calls. We're taking you home."

He stared at them silently, and there was a complex of feelings in his mind that made thinking almost impossible. Bitterness was heavier than anything else.

"That's fine for someone who won't hate an enemy—though you're quick enough to employ hate when it's useful." He looked at Miles steadily. "What about the rest of the world? Will they welcome a bomb-carrying robot monster as a friend?" Bill Norden wanted to know.

Miles put his hands on Norden's shoulders, while Pat went back into the workroom. "Sit down on the desk, Bill," he urged. The only people who know are the two of us, and Jim—the psychologist who predicted exactly how you'd react from the beginning. He also gave you a test that first day that involved our top-grade X-ray machine—not one of those fluoroscopic toys. It's a good thing you've got your brains all through you, because

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when I get done, you'll be literally empty-headed."

Pat came back with a collection of equipment. Norden stared, trying to sit up. "You must be insane. Do you want to be killed if I blow. Are all humans crazy?"

Miles tightened his grip on Norden's shoulder. "Hold still. It shouldn't hurt. We're going to leave the communication gadget where it is, as it may be useful, later. But that bomb must come out." He smiled abruptly. "As to humans—well, you should know."

VIII

Three days later Bill Norden took his hands from the back of his neck, and sat up. He joined Miles and Pat at the screen of the big life-force "radar." Far out in space, a group of swiftly moving objects were drawing together, according to the pips that traced their course. They formed into clusters and began heading outwards.

The pips grew dimmer almost instantly, though they should have lost only half their brightness after a billion miles of traveling.

"Obviously faster than light, and heading straight toward Sirius," Miles said slowly. "The poor devils! Until some darned fool from Earth goes there one day to try to make peace with them, they're going to live every hour of their lives in the horrible certainty that we can wipe them out whenever we choose—and that the best their race could do was a total failure. They'll probably have sunk back to being scared, unhappy savages before we reach them."

Norden thought of the charts that had been shown him while he lay in the communicating position. Earth had enough life-force projectors to sweep the skies with lethal radiation already, and she had just begun to tool up.

The Aliens had guessed wrongly about every step—they'd followed a logical pattern against a race that defied logic.

And somehow, his hatred of them was gone. "You'll have the superlight drive next year, probably," he guessed. "There are enough of their ships out there now with Aliens who died before they could set off their bombs for you to figure that out. Earth will be sending a ship there before they can revert to complete savagery."

"And I suppose you want to be on it?" Pat asked. She looked at her father, smiling thoughtfully as he grinned in answer to her lifted eyebrow. "I imagine the three of us could swing permission, at that."

Norden nodded. He'd planned it all out. He'd have to go back to university work, pretending to explore the new trails of science that had opened with the discovery of Hardwick's spectrum. The formulae he'd developed had

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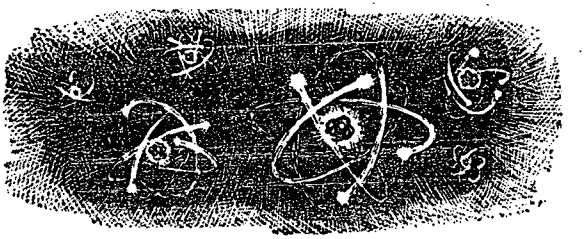
been destroyed, but he could always remember enough to keep up with the eager young men who would go plunging into the field.

Maybe, that way, by the time the probable levels of telepathy and other psi-phenomenon had been discovered, the world would be ready for them. He had no intention of acting as a super-brain, however well equipped he might be. With the emergency over, the human race could discover enough by itself.

Miles and his daughter would be busy with the long and difficult job of trying to re-settle the planets that the Aliens had despoiled. But all three of them would be ready when the first ship capable of reaching the stars had been built.

Norden drew himself up.

"Yes," he said. "Yes, I guess I want to be on it. I helped teach the Aliens enough about human beings as enemies. Now I'd like to teach them about us as friends."



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or darwin, if you prefer

by . . . Mel Hunter

Mr. Harbinger could not quite believe in the Mouth. But poor Mr. Harbinger—or Darwin, if you prefer—are gone to other times.

MR. HARBINGER WAS tired of his job. In fact he was so tired of it he put down his pencil in the middle of a series of chemical notations. All noted, he realized with sudden clarity, in a disgustingly neat and orderly fashion.

"Mr. Cushman, sir," he said quietly to the small, prissy man at the desk near the wall, "why don't you take these titrations and jam them straight up the middle of you know where?"

And with that previously inconceivable remark Mr. Harbinger put on his hat, removed his spotless, starched smock and passed through the doors of the Cushman Chemical Co., Inc. for the last time and decidedly the most satisfactory time.

Upon arriving home to his ridiculously—he suddenly noted with even greater clarity than before—orderly, proper, drab room, Mr Harbinger sighed. He removed his hat, pocketed his glasses, and sank in bleak defeat into the sole, uncomfortable easy chair which graced his room. There was another of those mo-

Mr. Hunter's superb art work has appeared on a baker's dozen science fiction magazine covers during the past year, but incredible as it may seem with this story we introduce him to the reading public for the first time as a science fiction writer. We say incredible, because this is not a beginner's story. It is sparkling, sophisticated, erudite—the work of a craftsman.

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mentarily crystal-clear glimpses.

"I've trated my last ti," he said aloud with the depths of the Styx in his colorless voice.

Closing his mind as best he could to this very disconcerting habit that had acquired him, Mr. Harbinger continued to sit there, looking at the dingy wall he had examined minutely now, every evening, for the past thirteen years.

I would appreciate it if that wall would just go away, he thought, knowing that it wouldn't, and that he was probably condemned to stare at it, or one worse than it, every evening for the rest of his life.

It was while he was contemplating a particularly uninteresting spot in the fading design of the wallpaper which was intended to decorate his room that he noticed it wasn't a spot at all, but an *eye*. Of all things!

Reacting in exactly the same manner as he would when confronted with a line in a newspaper ad which defied his watery vision, he plucked his pince-nez from a vest pocket and placed them in their accustomed notch upon the bridge of his nose.

"Go away," he said to it, when he had assured himself that it was most decidely an *eye*.

"Why?" returned a *mouth*, suddenly materializing out of the design below both *eyes*, the second of which had resolved itself in time to wink at him in a most disconcerting manner, almost rudely, one might say.

"Because," Mr. Harbinger faltered, at a loss as to how best to converse with a disembodied *mouth* and a pair of floating *eyes* which could not even remain on a line with each other, but kept drifting about over a small area of the wall, bumping together now and again.

"In a moment you'll commit a non-sequitur like 'Oh yeah?' and I will scream," the *mouth* promised.

Mr. Harbinger, after a moment's pause in which he frantically tried to swallow those very words, somehow risen to his lips for the first time in his life, grasped at a straw.

"Would a drink help make you go away?" he quavered. He was now beginning to feel that his mind was running down, and since he had never had a drink in his life, he possessed the abstainer's conception of alcohol as an instantaneous neural bombshell.

"A drink for which one of us?" was the reply, and it sent him off in a whole new wilderness of speculation.

"Which one of the three of you needs one?" he gulped, completely bemused.

"Three of who?" the *mouth* asked, in some consternation. Almost, Mr. Harbinger thought, in a trace of fright quickly concealed. "Oh, you mean those two

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eyes," it said laughing in obvious relief. "I'm sorry if their moving about that way upsets you, but I seem to have a bit of trouble with my control." The tone became somewhat rueful. "The mechanisms are not in very good condition these days."

"Listen," exclaimed Mr. Harbinger, "If I am going to have hallucinations, I want, no, I insist that they be of an ordinary garden variety, not cluttered with such feeble self-excuses as machinery being at fault." He was quite wrought up, and to be so shook him visibly, for he was accustomed to a most unruffled, detached manner of thought.

"The fault lies not with machinery, or, as I might like to tell myself, with this modern technical age running away too fast for us poor day-by-day mortals to keep up with it!" Mr. Harbinger took a deep breath, said, "That's not it at all. It's just that I have always had a romantic streak in me that is dying of malnutrition. I'm choked by the tedium, the huge, calibrated double-titrated BOREDOM of it all!"

He sat down limply, breathless, for this was a major oration for Mr. Harbinger to deliver all at once.

"Hell," said the *mouth*. "Me too."

"What?" Mr. Harbinger faltered, becoming somewhat surer by the instant that such a remark was out of character for a deranged hallucination. It seemed to him, though he admittedly was ceasing to be a reliable judge of such matters, that the particular hallucination in question should be taking more the part of the strangling Don Juan in him, the drowning Errol Flynn, the departing Da Vinci.

"I said, 'Me too,'" the *mouth* declared again, pausing then to retract a wandering left *eye*, which had developed a fondness for a repetition of the pattern a foot or two down the wall.

"Where I come from there is nothing but boredom, too," it went on. "All day, every day, I run test checks on various gadgets, finding flaws, and lacking the materials to put them in proper order, even if I had the knowledge, and even if anybody cared whether I did or not."

It pursed itself, as if remembering the pall of it all, and continued. "I had hoped to find a Time when people were lively; when there was zip and a dash to just getting up in the morning; when somebody would care what you did every day. Oh, not that they don't care if I should miss a day," it quickly qualified. "They care very much about *that*. Laws, you know, but just that and no more.

"Why, if I never succeeded in repairing a single machine my whole life long, no one would say a word. I only try out of bore-

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dom, and even that gets dull after a few years."

"I'm afraid I don't understand." Mr. Harbinger said, sitting back in his chair when he realized that it was silly to hang on the words of an hallucination from the depths of one's own mind. "Really!" he thought, "One should already know every word it said." But then he puzzled again over the content of the *mouth's* words.

"It's very simple," the *mouth* went on. "Should we really get a machine in absolutely perfect working order, it is immediately carted away to a warehouse and stored, all snug in an indestructible cocoon . . . so it will never wear out again, you know." It sighed. "Really doesn't pay to get interested, or try to be a perfectionist, any more."

Mr. Harbinger felt an unaccountable twinge of sympathy at the truly apathetic tone of the *mouth*, which appeared to droop a bit at the corners, as though it could never again think of a thing to smile at. The *eyes* drooped too, if such a thing can be conceived, though he had an extraordinary disinclination to look at them, being continually unnerved by the way they insisted on drifting about.

"Cup of tea?" he asked nervously, offering this small irrelevancy as a means of changing a subject which so clearly depressed his parturated companion . . . nor did the subtle development of his concept of the apparition on the wall escape his notice.

He now seemed to be of two minds over the whole thing. Either he was succumbing to the reality of his hallucination—and his sketchy remembrance of college Psych told him that meant he was either very sane or very insane; he couldn't recollect which—either that or he was having the scientific, or para-scientific, adventure of the age.

"Why, I'd love one!" answered the *mouth*, the corners undrooping noticeably. "I had no idea you Twentieth Centuryites were so civilized as all that . . . Tea. Imagine!"

Mr. Harbinger fairly popped out of the chair, unstrung again at the reference, clearly made in deprecation, to his own century. However, he covered over admirably the mental abyss which yawned at his feet by clattering about among the few pieces of chipped china in his cupboard as though his sanity depended on the amount of distracting noise he could wring from the simple act of setting out a tea service for two. And indeed, for the moment, it did.

He accepted gratefully, to put it mildly, the few moments respite accorded him by the small, secure hum-drum of preparing the hot water, of fussing over just the minutely exact amount of tea leaves to be spooned into each cup.

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Once again, as he invariably did each time he prepared the beverage, he silently congratulated himself on his one small talent . . . but the dilute pleasure to be derived from such a trivia evaporated the instant he considered what would again confront him when he turned from the tiny Pullman kitchenette.

He grew faint at the thought of being forced once more to brave the wandering improbable *eyes*, and the completely unthinkable *mouth*.

A worse thought crossed his reeling mind as he started for the other side of the room, trying to walk the tea over with his eyes closed, but giving that up as impossible when he remembered the perilously threadbare condition of his rug.

"Will I have to"—pause—"help you drink it?" The cups clattered betrayingly in each hand, no matter how mightily he strove to control his nerves.

"Heavens no," laughed the *mouth*. One *eye* crinkled in apparent amusement, the other continued to contemplate what Mr. Harbinger referred to as "the W.C.."

A *hand* shot out of the wall and tapped Mr. Harbinger on the shoulder from the side of his weakest eye.

At this completely unexpected assault, poor Mr. Harbinger gave a despairing little gasp, and would have dropped both cups smash on the floor had not a second *hand* materialized instantly, and snatched them both, more or less expertly, in mid-air, spilling hardly a drop or two.

"My!" Mr. Harbinger mumbled weakly, sinking like a wilting leaf into his patently uneasy easy chair. "I'm afraid the complications of this thing, be it lunacy or be it occult or whatever, are getting completely beyond me."

He sat there trembling and impotent, unable to do much of anything beyond refusing to observe the two bizarrely supported cups of steaming tea.

At last the *mouth* said in some reproach, "If you will be good enough to take one of these off my hands . . . Oh, I say . . . off my hands! . . . I'd very much like to have a bit of the other."

The left *hand* seemed to extend itself toward Mr. Harbinger a bit, and though he could not help but cower down in his chair, unhinged as he was by all this, he at last realized that it would be only common courtesy to do what the *mouth* had asked.

So realizing, he forced, literally forced, his trembling hand to take the cup from the proferring impossibility, and retract slowly enough to avoid catapulting the chattering china across the room. As it was there was a good deal of splashing before he managed to get it safe on the small table by the side of the chair.

The *mouth* made a creditable

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job of the tea-sipping, considering the handicaps it was forced to operate under; the wandering *eyes* and all. And at length, after performing a most peculiar contortion in obvious reluctance to further prostrate its host by asking for a napkin, it voiced a thought which caught Mr. Harbinger's attention in spite of his badly shattered composure.

"Doesn't it seem," it said musingly, almost to itself, "as though there ought to be some way we, that is to say you and I as we exist in our own Time, could right the wrongs of our respective situations."

It wasn't a question—more of a spoken dream thought, with all the drifting oddness of inflection that those occasionally voiced wisps of desire usually possess.

The very familiarity of that unmistakable kind of shading, its very humanness convinced, in a second, Mr. Harbinger of the reality of the thing which was occurring in his room, as all the fantastic things which had gone before had failed to do more than terrify him beyond enduring. He became, in that instant, a believer.

Accordingly he said the, to him, proper thing.

"I don't believe we've met."

They talked, thereafter, for hours . . . long into the night; undisturbed by the passage of time, not distracted, at least not very badly distracted, by the recurrent pangs of the unsated supper appetite; exchanging small bits of unhappiness in their separate lots, and each sympathizing heartily and hopelessly with the misfortunes of the other like two long-lost souls—as indeed they were.

The upshot of it was that they resolved to meet again in the same manner when the conditions of their separate lives permitted, and to this end they set a series of future dates, calculated to find the disembodied man—whose name turned out to be Jones—at liberty to manipulate the forbidden Time mechanism of his age at an hour when his workshop was deserted, and when Harbinger might be expected to be at home after the day's job hunting—a prospect from which he shrank—or a day's work, if he should be fortunate enough to ever get another job.

A possibility he doubted, due to the precipitate, not to say frank, or even to say vulgar, now that he thought of it, manner in which he had informed his previous employer of his decision to resign.

But, meet they did, from time to time, and they had many good laughs over the pun in that one. When it came to puns, Jones was pretty adept and it was a puzzle to Mr. Harbinger how the language had changed so little in a hundred and fifty years.

Jones cleared that up by explaining that the status quo in everything from contraceptives to

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slang had been rigidly maintained and enforced for nearly all that time, beginning with the great Scholars' Debate in the U.N. in 1971.

Eventually, a night came when Jones greeted Mr. Harbinger with startling news. "I don't know whether it had occurred to you," he said slowly, "but I could arrange, I think, for you to get a job up here in good old Two Thousand and Ninety Four if you wanted me to."

Jones said it slowly, for he had found that such novel ideas were apt to throw Mr. Harbinger into an attack of jingling nerves by virtue of their very novelty; a commodity he found a very hot thing to handle.

"My word!" Mr. Harbinger said, at length. "What on Earth would I do up there? And how about identification, and all that?"

Now that he had somewhat assimilated the idea, details passed rapidly through his head, spinning as it was now with the mystery of the even suggested possibility of him. . . . HIM, Henry Harbinger, *taking a jaunt in Time*. Oh, the ideas, the details came, but, for a few moments he was too carried away with the ROMANCE of it all to grasp at them, to do more than allow the 'gasping Juan,' the 'sinking Flynn,' the 'distant Da Vinci' to reverse themselves for an instant and show small signs of inner life.

The *mouth* at length interrupted, though with courtesy, this reverie which showed signs of going on and on. "Oh, the details are simple enough," it said. "I've already taken the liberty of producing several dozen sets of foolproof identity files which I can bribe a Civil Servant to slip into the Master Record Section. You would be listed as a research chemist, and given unlimited funds to experiment to your heart's content, and with no control exercised over the work you choose to do."

"Unbelievable," Mr. Harbinger whispered, all the while wanting desperately to believe such a miraculous thing could somehow come to pass.

The *mouth* smiled. The *eyes* crinkled. Then the *mouth* said, "Hmmm, pick a name. Smith, Ackerman, Evans, Daugherty . . . all good solid names to fit your appearance."

Mr. Harbinger rose to the delicately extended bait at last. "I imagine, with a little chicanery, I could arrange for you to get into something here too, if you would want to."

He rose from his chair, fired and appalled at once by the notion of bringing a Civil Servant, or some such Romantic dastardy. Pacing the floor, he huffed and puffed to himself in contemplation of intrigue, looking for all the world like a small boy planning a daring raid on a neighbor's pear tree.

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"Social Security . . ." he mumbled. "Voter's registration . . . Income Tax records . . . hmmm."

As he paced, the *eyes* wandered alarmingly over the surface of the wall, but he didn't notice, having long since become more or less accustomed to that small absurdity.

At last he stopped dead, in possession of the solution, and relieved—though he would never admit it, least of all to himself—to see a way around the bribery and such things, Romantic though they doubtless were.

"You can take mine, if you don't mind the name, and all. My record is clean—never been arrested, except once for jay-walking ten years or so ago."

He paused to consider the ramifications of this infinitesimal aberration, but at length decided, with much humming and vacilation, that there was no chance of his fingerprints having been taken for that; and remembering that his state did not require them on a driver's license, either.

Finally they agreed to try it. There was a slight bit of trepidation on Jones's part, for he explained to Mr. Harbinger that it would be necessary to draw mightily on the power supply of the area surrounding his workshop. But that the exchange would be effected instantly by the Time Mechanism, as he always called it, and that, by the time anyone arrived at the workshop from Master Power to investigate, Mr. Harbinger—or Darwin, as he would be in his new Life and Time, he having taken great pleasure in the illustrious history of that appellation, and insisted on it—would be long gone in the streets and away, safe in his new identity.

They shook hands on it, and a queer gesture it must have been . . .

At last the appointed day arrived. Then the appointed hour, and at long last, the appointed minute and second. Jones had assured Mr. Harbinger—or Darwin, if you prefer—that he had taken extraordinary pains to make sure the Time Mechanism would be in perfect working order. But unfortunately the devil-may-care attitude of the technicians over at Master Power, was beyond his ability to rectify; indeed, had not occurred to him at all.

As a regrettable consequence, at the instant he threw the switch, at the precise second the Time Mechanism seemed to swell itself for the momentous event it was about to initiate, a cat-napping n'er-do-well of a technician over at Master Power, a recognized incompetent among his fellows and a braggart to boot, shifted his up-propped feet from one instrument bank to another more comfortable.

And in doing so, tripped a switch with a careless toe; robbed the great Time Mechanism of the last ounce of energy necessary for

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the task it was attempting, and so stranded poor Mr. Harbinger—or Darwin, if you prefer—and poor Mr. Jones in the constantly shifting anomalies and vicissitudes of Variable Time . . .

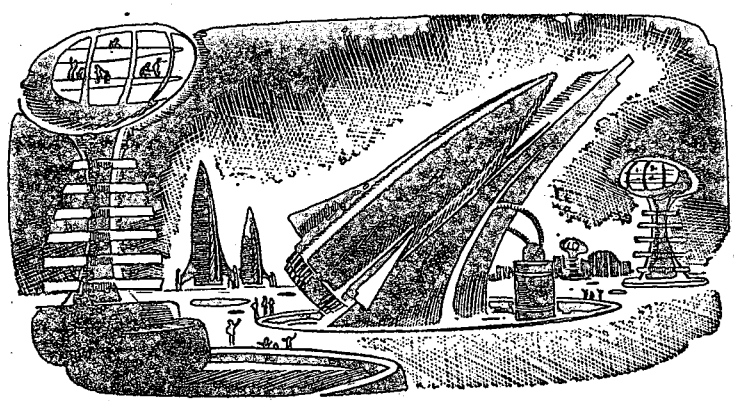
Perhaps you have seen them occasionally for an instant: an *eye* peering at you in pitiable entreaty from under a leaf of a tree as you pass. Of course, when you look closely, they—or whichever of them it was; poor Mr. Harbinger, or Darwin, if you prefer, or perhaps it was poor Mr. Jones—are gone on to other Times, and other crannies to peer out of for a moment.

Perhaps you have heard a *voice* call out to you on some unlikely occasion, or in some improbable place. I remember once hearing a *voice* distinctly cry out, "You there. . . ."

But when I turned about I could catch only a fleeting glimpse of a *mouth* and one *eye* as they vanished from the side of a nearby church steeple, thirty feet or so in the air.

I suppose it was only the merest chance that I happened to glance directly at that spot as I turned, or else I should never have known who it was who called.

As it is I still wonder whether it was poor Mr. Jones, or poor Mr. Harbinger—or Darwin, if you prefer.



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the woman obsession

by William Campbell Gault

Surely Collins was an idiot. He kept dreaming of women in a world that knew nothing of love's delight. But where there's life—

IT WAS ON the Mars-Jupiter run, a trip flea-bitten with asteroids, and needing a Level-One navigator. In all the galaxy, there were three Level-One navigators, and Horse Collins was one, and he was ours. By 'ours,' I mean *Gideon Shipping, Inc.* Twelve years I've piloted for them, and I think they're the best in the business.

Johnny "Horse" Collins was a typical space bum in one way. He was restless, he wanted to see what was out there. But he lacked discipline. And his thinking was earth-bound conventional. He'd even played football at college, and that's where he'd picked up the 'Horse' nickname. He'd been an All-Earth fullback, and why he'd gone on to navigator's school from there I'm not competent to judge. A man who can make All-Earth in a game dominated by robots is bound to have some body. No one but a sportswriter would suspect he might also have a mind.

Horse had a fine mind for his business; otherwise he was, as I've said, rather conventional, like

Few writers possess William Campbell Gault's sensitive capacity for balancing delicacy with daring in themes which gracefully skirt the edge of the outrageous, and open up entire new worlds of speculation which future historians will most assuredly encounter in their travels time and time again. Seldom has he written a story more imaginatively audacious than this.

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a fullback. He liked women, for one thing.

"Why?" I asked him one day. "Their primary function is handled better by the Massago-Lust. If they have any secondary functions, I've forgotten them."

"You never knew any of their functions, except through books," Horse answered. "Second-hand living."

I stared at him. If traveling among the stars wasn't living, then what the hell was? I asked him that pointblank.

"It's nothing I could explain to you," he said. "You're space-happy."

"Why are you here, Horse?" I asked him quietly.

"Because I thought there'd be adventure, out here. Strange lands and strange people."

"Jupiter isn't a *strange* land. It's simply a land of ice and lava, a grotesque, fascinating, frightening . . ."

"No people," Horse interrupted. "And how about Mars?"

"Mars is a disappointment, sure. I was talking about Jupiter, and you say 'no people.' Earth is full of people. Too full. That's why we have the Massago-Lust."

"And the women rationed to the scientists. Who do they think they are?"

"They're the people who cut our shackles, fullback. They're the people who refused to be earth-bound."

"Mmm-hmm. And they're the cuties who could just as well maintain the population quota with artificial insemination, too. But do they? Come to think of it, why don't they?"

"You'd better check your orbit log," I told him. "We're getting into asteroid alley."

"Yes, Chief. Yes, Boss. Yes, *Sir!*" He pulled out the flats, and looked through the electronic scanner. Then he picked up a stylus and adjusted it to the graph arm, and took another look through the scanner.

He seemed to be frozen there. "Mi Gawd—"

"What's happened? You damned fullback, if you've lost our line to—"

He waved, stiff-armed. "Shut up. We're right on orbit. I just saw a woman. And *what* a woman. She was waving to me!"

In all the galaxy there had been three Level-One navigators. There were now two.

"Naturally," I said patiently. "You would. That would be *your* mirage—a woman."

"I saw a woman," Horse insisted evenly, "on—" He was consulting his flats, frowning. "On—Well, I'll be damned."

"You also saw a planetoid that doesn't exist. I'll name it for you, Horse's Asteroid. A fitting name."

Collins didn't answer, right away. He was flipping levers, connecting the scanner to the chart, and also to the controls. Then he said, "Okay, Skipper. We're under

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mechanical control. Relax, if you know how."

I locked the board and stretched my neck. Horse lighted a cigarette, a vice I deny myself. His eyes looked—bemused.

I said, "You saw a woman where there could be no women. I'll have to enter it in the log, Johnny."

"Sure," he said. He took a deep and weary breath. "You know what the boys call you?"

"Slide Rule Sam," I answered. "I'm proud of it."

"Why? A robot could handle your job."

"For a man who made his reputation in a robot's game, you're talking rather haughtily, fullback. If a robot *could* handle my job, a robot would be giving you orders right now. Gideon Shipping is cost-conscious enough for that, despite the wages they pay."

"Wages," Johnny said. "Is that all a man works for, wages?"

"At our level, that's all a man works for," I assured him. "You're talking like a Capitalist, Horse." I watched for a reaction.

He started to say something, then shook his head. "You'd probably enter that in the log, too, if I said it." He put out his cigarette thoughtfully. "Sam, on the way back I want you to look through that scanner. If we delay our trip back an hour, the orbits of the other planetoids will be about right, and that one should be, too. Then you can enter the fact that we *both* saw it. You think I'm space-simple. But you won't be able to doubt what you'll see with your own eyes."

I said evenly, "I've traveled this line for twelve years and I've had navigators before who saw mirages. You're just not emotionally stable, Horse."

"I'm not punchy, either," Horse said. "You can have my resignation right now, Sam."

"Resignation? That's a word I've forgotten, Horse. You'll be re-assigned when we return to base."

He lighted another cigarette and went back to his desk. And I wondered who we'd get to take his place. The schools hadn't had a Level-One navigator in six years and the only two graduates who met that specification were very happy on other runs. Maybe, he wasn't completely gone . . . Maybe . . . ? But that wasn't scientific thinking.

Horse said, "Ever read about the old trains on Earth, Sam?"

"Second-hand living," I quoted him. "That's what you called reading."

"All right. It's better than not living at all. Anyway, in those old days, people along the tracks used to wave at the passengers as the trains roared by, for no reason I can think of. At any rate, for no *scientific* reason. What happened to me was pretty much like that. Sort of romantic, wasn't it?"

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"An earth-bound iron sluggard moving through cow pastures. Is that romantic to a man who's seen Jupiter?"

"No, I guess not," Horse said quietly. "Only to me, I guess."

I turned on the video-viewer above the board, and as the glow brightened, I could see the robot quarters and Van Elling playing bridge with three of our brightest automatons. Van's a great boy to buck impossible odds, but otherwise rational. He's our robot master.

Van looked up from the game at the signal light, and smiled, "About time, Skipper?"

"You'd have to ask the navigator."

Van's eyes shifted. "What's he sulking about?"

Horse waved. "How you coming with the master-minds?"

"I'm winning. I've found a system." He looked back at me. "Skipper, there should be two robot masters on this run, and you know it."

Horse laughed. "A partner, eh, Van?"

"Why not? Psychic bids, that's what throws them off. But it throws off my partner, too, and I don't make what I should. How about it, Sam?"

I said, "You wanted a report from the navigator. I'm holding the screen open for that."

Van Elling's face stiffened, and his eyes went to Horse's. Collins said, "Seven hours and twelve minutes." I turned off the viewer.

Silence in the cabin and I was uncomfortable. Damn it, there had to be discipline on board, and I was in command.

Horse said quietly, "Are you a natural son-of-a-broomstick, or do you work at it?"

Rage flamed in me, and I waited until it had languished. Then I said calmly, "I'm your superior, and I've been too lenient. I'm not strong enough to fight you but I'm powerful enough to destroy you. I intend to. Look forward to a long career in the mines of Mars, fullback."

"Even you, with all your connections, couldn't rig that," Horse said lightly. "You can ground me, and hope I get court-martialed for insubordination. I've a few connections, too."

Silence, again. I went over to his scanner and checked our coordinates. I brought out the log and entered his mirage and his insubordination. Why quibble? Let the record speak.

Europa loomed below us, now, and Jupiter dead ahead. The oxygenator sent its draft along the back of my neck, and I shifted in my seat, remembering his question about artificial insemination. That in itself could be considered subversive. Not that I hadn't thought it, and millions of others, but he'd *voiced* it.

The scientists had the money, the power, the commerce. And hadn't they earned it? Hadn't

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they made all this quite possible?

We hadn't said a word right up to the time I put the forward blasters on for the Jupiter mooring.

The buzzer from the rear hatch was buzzing now, and I threw the switch to open it. Van Elling came in with his duryllium helmet on, beating his hands on his thighs.

Collins helped him with the helmet, and Van said, "Cold, cold, cold, cold, cold. Chief, we might lose a couple minutes on the loading. Those boys aren't what they were when we bought them."

Through the oxygenator, I could smell ammonia and burning elgeron. I went to the viewer room and switched to the landing ramp. The robots were moving down the ramp at a pace which might have been slower than usual, but didn't seem so to me.

Behind me, I could hear Van Elling and Horse Collins whispering. Mutiny?

I watched the first of the robots go into the big hole that led to the elgeron deposits, and came back to see Van at the duplicate robot control board we had to use at the end of a trip. Van was looking worried, but it could have been feigned.

"A few minutes?" I asked. "How many is a few?"

"I said 'a couple' only, Chief, but I think that was a bad guess. It might be an hour."

Horse was smiling. Van kept his face averted.

"Delayed an hour?" I asked, and then it came to me. Horse wanted another look at his asteroid. That's why they'd whispered.

"I'm afraid," I said, "an hour's delay would be too long, and I hope neither of you think I'm being fooled by your cute little tricks. This isn't the time for trickery."

"Sorry, Chief," Van said. "I'm doing the best I can."

He kept his attention on the control board and Horse bent over his charts. They ignored me. Well, I had a lot of strings to pull. They'd regret this day, both of them.

The smell of molten elgeron was heavy now, and the bite of ammonia. The robots were coming back up the ramp, carrying enormous chunks of the solidified, translucent stuff. On Mars, it would be crushed in the huge, automatic grinders and mixed with the stydium of that planet, and sent in radiation-proof ships to the laboratories of Earth.

One robot seemed to falter for a second, and I glanced quickly back toward the cabin where I could just see Van at the control board. I couldn't tell by his manipulation of the toggles whether the robot's falter was deliberate or not, but I saw him glance at Collins and smile.

Rage simmered in me, pulsated,

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and I stood there for seconds in the viewing room, waiting for it to recede. The whole line of robots was stationary now and the one who'd faltered was leaning over against the guard rail of the ramp.

I came into the cabin and said, "You'd better put on your suit, Van. There's a robot out there holding up the line."

Jupiter was no place to venture without proper radiation shielding, and our space suits weren't the best in the world for radiation protection.

He said, "I think I can handle it from here, Chief."

Horse said quickly, "I'll go out and see what I can do. No sense in taking a chance on jamming the whole line, Van." Collins glanced at me for confirmation.

I shrugged. "Suit yourself. But remember—I didn't order you out."

"Unless you'd like to go, Chief," Horse said meaningfully.

I shook my head. I flushed, too, though there wasn't any reason for it. Unnecessary risks are not a part of a pilot's job.

Horse murmured something that sounded like "gutless" and I said sharply, "Would you repeat that?"

His gaze met mine levelly. "I didn't say a word, Chief. I'll get my suit on."

In a little while, I saw him out there on the ramp putting on a great show of trying to adjust the robot's delemeter, which is what gives them their uncanny balance.

After about twenty minutes, he waved and stood to one side, and Van Elling sent the impulse through. The robot staggered, and then came back to an upright position. Collins stood at the broad part of the ramp as the line began to move again.

Discipline begins with self-discipline, I told myself. *No man ever achieved anything without self-control.*

The more complex robots stayed in the storeroom of the ship, checking the tonnage, and classifying the elgeron according to quality. These were just the haulers, on the ramp, and Van controlled them completely from his board.

His word regarding their breakdown would be the accepted word with the bosses. I would have a difficult job getting anything on Van Elling.

But Horse Collins? Horse had seen a woman on an asteroid that didn't exist. Horse had been guilty of insubordination. He would need more friends than he had to wriggle out from under those charges.

There was another breakdown before we were finished loading, and they'd timed it well. We blasted off an hour later than usual.

Van went back to the robot quarters and Horse to his charts, and I had some more entries for

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the log. I'm not a talkative man, but Horse was. The silence in the cabin must have bothered him.

He said, "Chief, we could start over. We could forget the nasty things that have been said."

"I have forgotten them," I said. "Once I enter something in the log, I forget it."

"All that happened you entered in the log?"

"All. Including your earlier request to delay our return an hour." I paused. "The disciplinary board can read whatever inferences they want from that, in the light of what happened later."

"I see. The report would put Van in the soup, too, Chief."

"I suppose."

"That'll lose you *two* good men."

"Will it?"

Silence for over an hour, and then Horse said, "Before the company filled you full of that discipline garbage, were you human, Sam? Did you dream of a better world, a normal world, a world with women?"

"Some things we outgrow," I said. "I'm doing exactly what I want to do."

Horse sighed, and the silence grew again.

I was dozing the next time he opened him mouth. "It's not necessary to stick it to Van, too, is it, Chief?"

"I record," I said. "I don't judge."

"It wasn't necessary to record my request. Don't give me that, Chief."

"In my opinion, it was necessary."

"Okay. Would you check my co-ordinates?"

He'd caught me in a nap, and I didn't think of the time. It was a routine request in a routine voice and I rose without thinking and went over to the scanner.

I put my eye to the eye-piece and saw *her*. A dark girl, without clothes, more beautifully shaped than any picture I'd ever carried as an adolescent. And she was waving!

A trembling possessed me, but I fought it. I looked up instantly at Horse, and I said, "You've increased the magnification about three million times beyond the requirements of the co-ordinate check. How do you expect me to substantiate your findings?"

Horse was smiling. "I know, I know. What'd you see, Chief?"

"Nothing. There was nothing to see. This will be recorded, too, Collins."

Collins was still smiling. "You'll record there was nothing to see?"

"I certainly will, and that you had the electronic scanner up to its full magnification for no apparent reason. That should finish you, Collins."

"Chief, if you saw nothing through that scanner, you're already finished. I don't want to stay in a service that would make something like you out of me."

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"You haven't the stuff to become something like me," I told him, and went back to my chair.

"The service," he said gently, "is looking for planets or planetoids that will support our kind of life. And you've just seen our kind of life. And you're not going to report it. That's going to be your cross. Because, Slide Rule, I'm not going to report it, either. That's my secret, back there. That's *mine*."

"Whatever it was you think you saw, you'll never see it again, Collins," I told him. "This is the only line from Mars to Jupiter and you're going to be out of work once we're back to base."

"You think," he said. "You hope. You pray."

I wonder what he thought I'd been doing in my twelve years with Gideon? I wonder if he thought I was so stupid I wouldn't have a few lines to the right people in twelve years? Did he think only the noisy ones could play this political game?

Once out of asteroid alley, I dozed. And dozing, dreamed of that black haired temptress waving, dreamed of her like some pimply-faced young idiot. Gad, if a man couldn't discipline himself after *my* training . . .

I wakened to find Horse nodding over his board.

I said sharply, "I'm ready to eat, Collins."

His head jerked upright, and he stared at me a few seconds. Then he stood up and went out to the small galley.

A stinking fullback trying to play the political game with Slide Rule Sam. How these athletes loved to over-rate themselves.

He brought my food, and then went into the galley to eat his.

When he came out, he said, "I'd like to nap, if you're going to be awake, Chief."

"I'll be awake for two hours. You'd better sleep fast."

"You're the boss," he said, which was his admission.

I gave him a bad time the rest of the trip and got not a single complaint out of him. And at Mars, we put on our suits and went ashore, and I entered my complaints with the subsidiary board at the company headquarters there.

They got us transportation to Earth next morning, and both Van and Horse were held for trial the following week.

That gave me time, and I pulled every string I knew in the four days before the trial. Horse was almost irreplaceable; Van could be replaced in five minutes.

But there was no need to worry about Collins. He didn't fight. He pulled no strings I knew of, and when he went up in front of the board, he pleaded space insanity.

He'd seen a mirage, he'd insisted on my checking it, he'd called me names and he took the full responsibility for the robot

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breakdown. Trying to save Van, I suppose, with that last.

Horse had a company lawyer, and he tried to establish the line that perhaps there had been life on the asteroid and that a discovery of that importance overshadowed the charges of insubordination and temporary space insanity.

I got on the stand and swore there had been no sign of life and not even an asteroid where Horse had fixed the scanner. I was safe enough, I knew. There were only a few ships on the run, and no other with a scanner of our power.

I hadn't wasted the four days. For three years, I'd been studying navigation in my spare time. I wasn't really qualified for the Mars-Jupiter run, but I had men high in the company who thought I was. I'd get by until I learned.

I didn't want anyone else on *that* scanner.

Van Elling was fired without prejudice, but I knew he'd have some time trying to get back into the service after the publicity of the trial.

Collins was held over for a higher review of his case on the possibility that his background was subversive. I was sure they'd find some capitalistic group he'd belonged to briefly in college.

I was back on Mars when I got word through the new pilot that Horse had never been brought before the higher tribunal. Somewhere, Van had managed to buy an obsolete, atomic two seater, and Horse had broken out of Embardo. The two of them had been seen by one of the Gideon ships a few million miles beyond Galaxy E.

Typical fullback thinking—that—taking off into space. If he'd wanted to hide, Earth was the place for it. Where could he get to with a clunk of a two seater? He was a navigator, granted. But he'd have to have something worthwhile to navigate.

Both the new pilot and the new robot master were young and properly respectful, space-dedicated boys, and my life, I knew, was going to be pleasant. And once I had mastered navigation, I was going to be damned near irreplaceable.

As we bored through space on the old familiar run, the thought came to me that probably Horse would head for his asteroid, and if he should make it, wouldn't that be something? Two men and one girl. I wonder how long Van would live.

Van was no fullback, nor a reasonably accurate facsimile thereof. Unless he had a weapon, he'd be no match for Horse.

The image of the girl came back to haunt me. I knew there'd been an expedition or two lost in asteroid alley on early exploratory trips, but they hadn't carried women. And her face was familiar.

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I went to a library and thumbed through some old newsprints. Of course! The photograph fairly leapt at me. Elsbeth Parrish, the science hater, the woman who'd gone on a lecture tour ridiculing the powers that be, making converts first in the women's schools and then in the co-educational institutions. The 'Live for Love' girl, Elsbeth Parrish.

Naturally the government had cracked down and tried to deport her to Mars. She'd disappeared a week before the trial, and one of those old Interplan Rocket Sedans had disappeared with her. The government had given her up as lost in space.

I could understand now why Horse had made the confession at his trial and why he'd been so submissive on the return trip from Jupiter. He'd tricked me into swearing there was no life on the asteroid. And now he could safely head there, because I was the one man alive besides him and Van Elling who knew there *was* life there, and my future depended on my not revealing it.

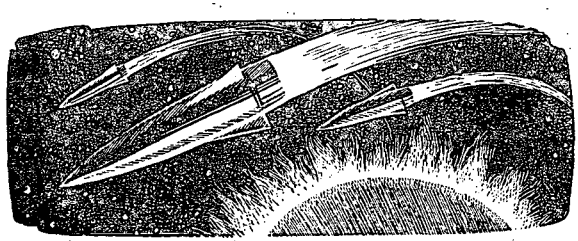
But could he make it in an atomic two seater? And two men for one woman—if he did make it? I had to know the answer.

When we came into asteroid alley, I had the scanner's magnification on at full strength, and I also had the automatic scanning control adjusted to the orbits I wanted. Even Horse Collins couldn't have pin-pointed it any better.

I wish I'd missed it. For both of them were there, Horse and Van, looking up my way and smiling, too. The slobs. There wasn't *one* woman there. There were three, all beautiful.

Two men and *three* women.

The dirty, science-hating sons.



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the cottage

by . . . Frank Belknap Long

There was a savage cruelty in Durkin's hatred of his children. Little did he know that on other worlds — cruelty boomeranged.

To Will Durkin it seemed to be the realization of a long-cherished dream—this return from town over a rutted dirt road, equipped and ready for a cruel duel with another man's offspring. He raised his left hand as he drove, staring at his bony knuckles, and then slashing at the empty air with a whiplash ferocity of purpose.

Perhaps there had been a hard core of cruelty in Durkin at birth. Perhaps he had knotted up his fists, and cried out in resentment on first seeing the sunlight, eager to hurt and punish.

It was difficult to say, difficult to be sure. But certainly the stony soil which had nourished his childhood had helped to make him what he was—a gaunt, restless-eyed man so consumed by animosity he could find no pleasure in merriment of any kind.

In town he had stalked with fierce impatience from the general store to the post office, and then back down Cedar Street to his car, clutching his purchase with

Frank Belknap Long's stories have appeared in twenty-seven cloth-bound anthologies bearing the imprint of leading publishers. They run the gamut from supernatural horror—in Dashiell Hammett's CREEPS BY NIGHT *and August Derleth's equally famed* SLEEP NO MORE*—to straight science fiction —in the widely popular Conklin, Wollheim, Derleth, Bleiler and Dikty volumes. We think you'll agree that this story is of anthology caliber too.*

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the greediness of a carrion crow eager to take flight. Now, beneath the leaden sky, in his asthmatic wreck of an automobile, he pictured himself as too shrewd and quick-witted to allow a woman's simpering stupidity to weaken his attachment to the land.

A dust storm could stir a man to anger, and rob him of a night's sleep. It could demolish his chicken cots, and embitter him in other ways. But it could also protect him by keeping him hard.

So certain was he of that hardness that the gathering clouds, the dust flurries, and the whistling wind gave him no concern. They seemed to be setting a seal on his purpose, and he was sure that if trouble descended from the sky he would know how to cope with it.

Unfortunately Durkin had no way of knowing that the desert was soon to blossom in ways that were strange. He heard the dull, occasional rumbling, and saw the sky light up far to the east. But his thoughts were on other things. If he had been told that the desert was being used by the Government as an atomic proving ground he would have dismissed the matter with a shrug.

Malice narrows curiosity. In the back seat of the creaking car a small, white cottage caught and held the leaden sky glow, its tiny windows gleaming like uncut jewels.

A man of wide and kindly sympathies would have taken delight in the cottage, for though it was a cheap toy it had been built with great respect for the critical eye of childhood. It had eight rooms, a porch trellis, and a little golden weathercock on its roof.

Durkin smiled spitefully, remembering with grim pleasure the child training article in the popular science magazine which had sent him into town in search of an inexpensive doll house.

The article had contained a great deal of meat, and its impact upon his mind had been remarkably direct. Give a kid a doll house with a mother and father doll inside, and you could find out exactly what he thought of his parents. He'd move the dolls around, and work out his private grudges on them. He'd pretend the dolls were his real parents, and act out what the article had called the family drama.

Yeah, why not? A man had a right to know what his own kids thought of him, hadn't he? Especially if they were stepkids, and owed everything to him. Apart from the fact that the article had been against punishing children the way he'd been punished as a kid—and what better way was there?—its ideas were good.

The article had contained a lot of fancy phrases like "harmful emotional repression," and "healthful release of guilt feelings." But giving a grudge a fancy name didn't change it one

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bit. If the kids he'd fed and clothed hated him his hand would come down heavy on them. Yes, by heaven. Each whack would ring out like a pistol shot.

It was high noon when Durkin came in sight of the farmhouse, and saw the children playing in the yard, and his wife standing in the kitchen door. Her stringy black hair annoyed him far out of proportion to its importance, and he was further incensed by the realization that she was staring up the road as if she had another complaint to make, and could hardly wait for him to come within earshot.

He drove into the yard muttering unpleasantly to himself. Abruptly his stepson Robert—a tall, freckled-faced youngster of nine—stopped playing. Seven-year-old Emily, thoughtful-eyed and less assertive, remained seated, but Durkin could see that there was a defiant something struggling in her head.

The ritual of mistrust they'd worked out against him never varied. As he descended from the car he became aware of a hostile silence hemming him in, making him feel like a stranger. Even their expressions betrayed them. The instant fear came into Robert's eyes Emily too became fearful, clutching the doll she was holding more tightly to her breast.

Flushed and resentful, Durkin stood waiting for his wife to advance toward him across the yard. She had been beautiful once, but she now only reminded him of a nag set out to pasture after years of usefulness about the farm. She was as handy about the farm as she was about a stove, but that didn't mean he had to be grateful to her.

He'd taken her in and married her, hadn't he? A woman of forty with two kids, a complaining woman who was always trying to meddle in his affairs.

"You're back early, Will!" Helen Durkin said.

"Yeah," he grunted, eyeing her bitterly.

"Did you buy the fertilizer, and the barbed wire?"

He shook his head, his lips writhing back from his teeth in cruel derision.

"I bought something better," he said. His voice was harsh, edged with mockery. "A present for the kids."

Durkin reached into the car as he spoke, and hauled out the doll house. He set it down on the stony soil directly in front of him, and folded his arms, his eyes darting toward his stepson in surly challenge.

"Come here, Robbie!" he called out. "Look what I've got for you!"

Robert scrambled to his feet with a startled gasp, and Emily turned to look at her mother in bewilderment. Durkin glanced triumphantly at his wife, stepped

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back, and waited for the children to approach.

Robert came forward slowly, stark incredulity in his stare. His sister followed at a less cautious pace, her fear swallowed up by the miracle that had taken place before her very eyes.

Robert spoke first. "Golly, it's a little house."

"A doll house!" Emily elaborated, falling to her knees, and staring in through the diamond-bright windows at a sight that made her catch her breath.

In a room on the ground floor four dolls sat at a circular table. Before each was a knife and fork, a tiny plate and a double serving of wax vegetables. The husband doll wore a stiff, ill-fitting store suit, the wife a checkered gingham dress, and the two children blue denim overalls.

The parents were wooden dolls, but Durkin had been forced to purchase the children separately, and insert them in the house. The children were made of some new-fangled plastic material which Durkin intensely disliked. But very lifelike dolls they were, and just the right size to lend wings to the illusion of a happy family about to break bread together.

"That's me!" Emily cried excitedly.

She raised a window, reached inside, and lifted "herself" out. The doll had dark hair and brown eyes, and Emily was an ash blond. But childhood is not a time for carping, and it has been well established that a completely unspoiled imagination can be sent soaring by a fancied resemblance in the twinkling of an eye.

"That's me, isn't it, Mommy?" Emily insisted. "Isn't it?"

She displayed the doll proudly to her mother, her eyes shining with unshakable conviction.

"Yes, dear—of course." Helen Durkin glanced sharply at her husband as she spoke. The look in his eyes frightened her. There was satisfaction in his stare, but it was a cold, derisive kind of satisfaction with no warmth or sympathy radiating out from it.

He was watching Emily as he might have watched a humming bird hovering over a cannibal plant, one of those horrible fly-trap things that grew in tropical jungles. What chance would the humming bird have against the sudden, cruel closing of the plant's spiked petals, its animal-like ferocity of purpose?

An overpowering surge of terror swept over Durkin's wife, tightening the muscles of her throat. *Will, don't*—she wanted to scream. *Don't punish the children because you hate me. Or because you hate yourself. Don't, Will, please*—

Robert failed to notice the trembling of his mother's hands, failed even to observe that his stepfather had not budged an inch from his attitude of sharp-eyed observation.

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For a moment the adult world was blotted out for Robert—blotted out completely. He knelt and stared through the cottage window as his sister had done, resting his hand on the arching trellis.

It was not a doll house to Robert. He took far too much pride in his budding masculinity to admit for an instant that he could be interested in a doll house. No—it was a cottage, small, white and very beautiful. He pictured himself as having a wife and children of his own and coming home every night to just such a cottage.

"You look tired," his wife would say. "You'd better rest a bit—then we'll have dinner." He could picture himself going into the bathroom and turning on the hot water. Later he'd open the windows wide to the night air. He'd hear crickets chirping as the children clustered about him.

But so complex and subtle are childhood identifications that he could also think of himself as still a boy, living with his sister in a cottage just as small, white and beautiful, but set adrift on a pirate-perilous sea remote from his stepfather's mockery.

With a swift, defiant gesture Robert reached in through the window, and grasped the crude doll replica of himself. He lifted it out, jarring the parent dolls slightly.

"Excuse me, Mom," he said.

To the replica of his stepfather he offered no apology.

Durkin's lips whitened, and for the barest instant a defeated look touched his gaunt face. From thought to attitude he had the whip hand over his stepchildren. Yet even when his power could not be questioned he found himself a shunned and forgotten man.

Fury turned the living flesh and bone of his face into a stone mask with features so sharp that his wife recoiled as if feeling the cruel rasp and bite of them against her cheeks.

Cursing softly, Durkin swung about and went striding toward the kitchen door without a backward glance.

All through dinner he was silent, completely ignoring his wife, and raising his eyes only to stare out the kitchen window at the bare yellow earth he could at least bend to his will. Even when the children excused themselves, and ran out into the yard again he remained sullenly uncommunicative.

In an attempt to make conversation Helen Durkin said: "Will, it came over the radio right after you left. They're making some more of those atomic weapon tests. Remember the last time—how the explosion shook the house?"

"So that's where the flash came from!" Durkin muttered. "I saw it when I stopped at the gas station to get my battery checked.

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I figured it was just heat lightning."

"Robbie saw it too," Robert's mother said. "It means a lot to a boy to know he's living in an age like this. In some ways Robbie is a man already, Will. A boy born a hundred years ago had to remain a child every waking hour. But not Robbie. Robbie was born into a different kind of world."

Her eyes flashed with stubborn pride. "Robbie has real strength inside of him, Will. He'll make a mark for himself in the world. He'll grow up knowing what atomic energy means. He won't age and dry up before his time. You ought to be proud of him, Will."

Abruptly Durkin pushed back his chair and stood up, his eyes grown sharp again from watching the children playing in the yard. He had avoided looking at his wife, but now he permitted his gaze to linger for an instant on her pinched and sallow features, in a scrutiny so mocking it made her almost physically ill.

Your brats hate me, his eyes mocked. *One of these days I'll catch them off guard and give them a lesson in discipline they won't forget in a hurry.*

She knew what he was waiting for. He was hoping they'd stop playing just long enough to cast a look toward the kitchen door filled with unmistakable hate. He was hoping to emerge beneath the darkening sky, and see Emily turn away her head, remembering the loving father she had lost, and the harsh, unbending man who had come to take his place.

She knew that he was waiting only for that. He was the kind of man who had to have an excuse to justify his every act of cruelty. Some oddity in his makeup made self-justification as necessary to him as breathing.

With a chill foreboding she watched him turn, and go striding out into the yard.

The children had been kneeling on opposite sides of the doll house, but they got up the instant they saw their stepfather approaching. Robert looked guilty, and his sister's face mirrored his guilt.

"You ate your lunch mighty fast," Durkin said. "What's going on here?"

"Nothing," Robert said.

"What kind of answer is that?" Durkin demanded, his face turning ugly.

"We were just playing house," Emily said, quickly.

"Then why did you get up so fast when you saw me?" Durkin asked. "Is there something in that house you don't want me to see?"

Robert shook his head, his eyes on the ground.

"Speak up! I asked you a question."

"We were just pretending," Robert said.

For an instant the man and the

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two children stood with the doll house between them. They were each aware that they had started a game that must be played out now to the bitter end, no matter how frightening it became.

"We'll soon know!" Durkin said.

Durkin bent swiftly, and without glancing at the children, picked up the house, and raised it until the ground floor windows were on a level with his eyes.

He stared in.

Children do not self-consciously engage in gruesome pranks—even when they hate. Emotional impulses which later in life are filtered through reason and become social attitudes remain in children appallingly direct.

Children are thus exposed to adult censure for acts which they would never dream of performing in a frame of reference removed from the playground and tied in with their socially-consolidated attitudes of respect toward home, school, and parents.

Children chalk up sidewalks, ring doorbells and throw stones at windows and are almost instantly sorry. But Durkin knew nothing of that. He only saw himself sitting on a red-hot stove, his long legs drawn up grasshopper fashion on both sides of his lank body.

What was even more shocking, he saw himself as a fiend incarnate. The children had done an astonishingly ingenious job of making a devil out of him by painting him in the darkest colors imaginable.

In fact, they had painted him black. The ill-fitting store suit had been removed, and with the aid of Emily's water-color set, and Robert's clay modeling set he had been made to resemble a demon being roasted over a spit.

Utterly fiendish was his charcoal-dark aspect of face and limb. Horns sprouted from his temples, and a long, forked tail, ash-gray in hue, coiled down over the stove like some evil brand snatched from the burning.

There were tiny gleaming coals in the stove fashioned of red isinglass. The stove had gone with the house, but by the matchless artistry of childhood something new had been added, and as Durkin stared all of the color drained from his face.

He was sitting directly over the coals, exposed to the cruelly searing blast in every part of his anatomy. For an instant the illusion of searing heat was so real that he responded psychosomatically. His nostrils dilated with the odor of burning flesh, and his nerve-roots shrieked as if irradiated by intolerable pain.

Then reality came sweeping back. Instead of an imaginary projection of himself he saw only a ridiculous wooden doll sprawled akimbo on a toy stove.

Shaking with rage, Durkin set the house down, swung about, and

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gripped his stepson savagely by the wrist.

"Just pretending, were you?" he muttered. "Just waiting for me to come out here, and pat you on the back."

Robert tried to break free. Sick with fear, he tugged and twisted, but Durkin had stronger fingers than a demon, and a deeper understanding of how a frightened boy could make a fool of a man by using his smallness as a cloak.

"You too, Emily," Durkin said. "Come here. I want to have a long, fatherly talk with you."

Emily turned and cast a frantic glance of appeal toward the kitchen door. When her mother did not appear she started backing away from her stepfather across the yard.

Without releasing her brother, Durkin circled around in back of her. "Not so fast, brat!" he warned. "You and Robbie play house in a mighty interesting way. Suppose you tell me more about it."

"Let me go!" Robert pleaded. "We just took one of the dolls and made a Halloween coal man out of him."

"A coal man, eh?" Durkin sneered. "That's sure odd. You must have forgotten it's not Halloween?"

"It doesn't have to be Halloween!" Robert protested.

"Doesn't it? I suppose not. You could turn on your own father just as well on Thanksgiving day. That's how grateful you are."

Emily spoke up defiantly then. "You're not Robbie's father," she said. "You never could be."

"I tried my best to be a good father to Robbie," Durkin said, lowering his voice in mock humility. "You can't claim I didn't try. But there comes a time when discipline's needed. No punishment's severe enough for a boy who'd like to see his own father roasted like a chestnut in a red-hot fire."

A sudden, terrible anger flared in his eyes. "No punishment's bad enough. But a strong birch switch laid on heavy may do some good."

He stared at Emily, his neck arched in chicken-hawk fashion. "I can't punish you the way I'm going to punish Robbie," he said. "You're too young—just a baby. But when a baby does wrong you've got to be stern. That's kindness."

Durkin bent abruptly, gripped his stepdaughter by the elbow, and lifted her to her feet. "A few hours without your supper in the dark—"

"Mommy!" Emily shrieked. "Mommy, *Mommy!*"

The kitchen door flew open, and Helen Durkin came running out of the house, her eyes wide with fright. She went up to her husband, and started tugging at his wrists.

"Let them go!" she cried. "Robbie hasn't done anything. I

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was watching every minute."

"He hasn't, eh?" Durkin glared at her. "He'd like to see me hanging from a rafter. Give him a piece of rope, and he'd hang me in effigy."

"He wouldn't. Why do you say a thing like that? You must be out of your mind, Will Durkin!"

"He would, I tell you. He's already done something just as bad. He's got to learn respect, and I'm going to give him the thrashing of his life."

"Will Durkin, you let them go. Do you hear? You've no right—"

Surprisingly Durkin complied. He released both children, and turned his full fury on his wife.

"I'm going upstairs and get a birch switch," he said. "You'd better see that Robbie stays right here in the yard. I'll hold you responsible. If he isn't here when I come back you can pack your things and get out. No right to punish my own son. We'll see—"

His eyes narrowed in relentless hate, Durkin swung about and went striding toward the house. Despite his rage he experienced a fierce, secret gratification in knowing he'd had the foresight to cut and trim a stout birch switch well in advance.

Perhaps it was intended by something in the mysterious, hidden texture of nature itself that Will Durkin should reach the house before the first blast came. Perhaps fury kindled and unleashed by a puny man in a moment of cataclysmic upheaval had an energy pattern of its own, capable of blending with that greater violence, and carrying its victim to disaster, precisely as a tiny squirming creature of the sea might be lifted up and carried on the back of a terrified tortoise.

Be that as it may, Durkin was well inside the house, crossing the kitchen to the living room when light flashed all about him, and a chill wind brushed the nape of his neck. His lips tightened, but for an instant he continued on, as if refusing to believe that a mere rumbling and quaking could prevent him from climbing a narrow flight of stairs, and returning to the yard with a cruel instrument of retribution in his clasp.

Then, abruptly, panic overcame him. Shock after shock shook the house, jarring up through him, threatening to pitch him off his feet. But even as he swung about in wild terror he could not quite relinquish what he had set out to do. One part of his mind remained filled with choking rage, and his hands were busy at his waist, unbuckling his cowhide belt and ripping it free. At least he'd give his stepson a hiding—

Suddenly through the kitchen door he caught a brief glimpse of the children, standing in the yard. They were clinging to their mother, but they were as yet untouched by the violence which was raging all about them.

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Durkin's jaw fell open. The violence increased with appalling suddenness, breaking every window in the house, filling the kitchen with blowing dust.

With a deafening roar the house vanished, carrying Durkin with it. The children cried out in bewilderment and fright, and pressed closer to their mother.

In every upheaval, no matter how violent, there may well be pockets of erratically channeled calm, regions of security which remain untouched by the turbulence surrounding them. Helen Durkin clung resolutely to an assurance which nothing could shake, and with her conviction that the children would not be harmed went a warm gratefulness that they had turned to her for comfort and protection.

She stood staring straight ahead, refusing to be dismayed, hearing only a dreadful humming sound which gradually died away.

Where the house had stood there spread only a smooth expanse of yellow sand.

The whirling was like nothing Durkin had ever known before. It constricted his chest, blurred his vision, and drove the blood in torrents from his heart. There was no stopping it, and as it grew steadily more intolerable he tore at his collar, swayed, and went down on his hands and knees.

Around and around the cottage whirled, now rising and tilting, and then descending with a terrible, jerky abruptness. Twice he tried to rise, but fell back helpless, powerless to save himself from the spineless inertia that sent him spinning to and fro like some ill-made, rain-sodden scarecrow dragged in disgust from a cornfield, and tossed into a butter-churning machine.

In one respect only was Durkin fortunate. His torment, though great and almost unendurable, was not absolutely continuous. There were moments when the cottage seemed to hover motionless in mid-air, or to drift lazily in a single direction with a buoyancy as light as thistledown.

Gradually these moments became more frequent, calming Durkin like a soothing palm pressed with compassion to his brow. More and more frequent until the merciless buffetings and swift, sickening descents ceased completely, and a light that was bright, clear and steady streamed in through the kitchen window, and somewhere off in the distance a snowy-crested bird burst into song.

There were flowers outside the window, scarlet and aquamarine faintly flecked with gold. Tall-stemmed and wide-petalled they were, almost screening the view, and if at that moment Durkin had been on his feet staring out he might well have failed to see the huge, joyously romping lad.

But Durkin was still lying prone, and the lad's curiosity had

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not as yet been acutely aroused.

The lad came swinging boisterously down a country lane, his lips puffed out in a childish pout, his chubby hands thrust deeply into the green and vermillion trousers of his play suit.

He did not love his foster father, and he had run away in a sudden burst of independence and was temporarily free to roam. Oh, it was good to be free to laugh and romp in the sunlight, and to build mud castles out of the gleaming red walls of *Snerkle* nests.

He came swinging around a curve in the lane and stopped abruptly, staring straight before him in utter disbelief.

For a moment he stood as if turned to stone, his eyes saucer-wide in the slanting sun glow. Then he was running forward with a cry of boyish eagerness.

The little cottage stood in a glimmer of sunlight and shadow cast by weaving boughs. All about it stretched a smooth blue lawn, starred with long-stemmed windflowers as tall as the house itself.

He clapped his hands in pure delight. True, he had a village of his own to play with, an entire toy village bright with weaving communication beams. But all the dolls were child dolls and the village no longer pleased him.

He pouted and became angry again when he thought about it. His foster father did not want him to play with grown-up dolls. His foster father was an old meanie, and he didn't want him to have any fun.

He was hovering directly over the house now, straddling it. He reached down with a chuckle of delight, and poked at the little red chimney with a stubby forefinger, beaming in simple pleasure as four tiny bricks tumbled out on the roof.

Then he bent over and stared with a puzzled frown at the smashed windows.

A moment later he was squatting before the house peeking in. Slowly as he stared all of the good-natured anticipation went out of his face.

Exaltation of a different kind came into his features, a fiendish kind of exaltation common enough in childhood, but often disturbing to adults.

It was shockingly disturbing to Durkin. Roused suddenly to consciousness in the middle of the kitchen floor he saw the great malicious child face staring in at him, and struggled frantically to rise, his eyes wild with terror.

There were other things Durkin did not understand, about energy, about time, about other worlds of life and purpose lying parallel to ours in undreamed of dimensions of space.

He did know that a single farmhouse in the path of a tornado could be uprooted and carried for miles through the sky. He knew that a fence could be leveled, a

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tree torn down and the rest of the countryside remain unscathed, even to the last sun-gilded haystack.

It was easy to understand how such things might be. But nothing had prepared Durkin's mind for the disturbing and frightening parallel which a scientist might have drawn from a hurricane's erratic course. He had no way of knowing that matter on the fringe of an atomic blast could be agitated abnormally, and pass into another dimension piecemeal.

He had no way of knowing that the desert at the edge of an atomic proving ground might decide suddenly to blossom like some multi-dimensional rose.

He had no way of knowing that *size* is a relative thing, varying with every matter dissolving energy shift in the physical universe, and that a house could be huge in one dimension, his own, and tiny in another, and might even indeed take on the aspect of a house built solely to delight the eye of childhood.

He had no way of knowing, for he had not heard the great eternal voices discussing it. The reddening of the rose meant nothing to him, the stars in their wheeling courses, the speculations of men like gods.

All time, all space is relative, Einstein had said. There is only one equation for energy, matter, light, fire, air—

And who knows how closely other dimensions may parallel ours?

Durkin had no way of knowing until the great dimpled hand reached in through the window and picked him up. Then, and only then, in one blinding flash of intuition, he guessed the truth.

Too late. The blade of grass was like a tendril rope, and it went so swiftly about Durkin's throat he had no time to leap back. As he screamed and struggled a huge wet palm smothered his mouth, rumpled his hair, and squeezed the breath from his lungs. His struggles were of no avail.

Emotional impulses which later in life are filtered through reason and harden into social attitudes remain in children appallingly fluid and direct. A child identifies itself with its toys and it is very easy for a child to see a living, breathing adult human being in a doll which is in reality quite unlike the object of its love—or hate.

Kneeling beside the house, a child Durkin knew nothing about thought it all out for the barest instant, its body oddly bent. Then it leaned forward, and hung its hated foster father very carefully to a ceiling rafter in the precise middle of the house.

Ever so slowly the child arose, and the snowy crested bird burst into song again, somewhere off in the distance. But Durkin knew nothing of that.

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the man who found out

by . . . Roger Dee

It's one thing to blow a bubble of glib, journalistic lies. Quite another to have that bubble burst in a nightmarish, green beyond.

THE TROUBLE WITH Fortenay was that he was not merely a skeptic but a professional skeptic, which is just another way of saying that he was a widely known and highly paid journalist who had long ago learned to capitalize on his penchant for iconoclasm. Fortenay was also given to the sort of reflexive arrogance inevitable to some small men, and was unscrupulous enough in its exercise to point up the flavor of his satiric commentary on any currently news-worthy phenomenon with the strong spice of semantic misrepresentation.

Fortenay was, in short, an able, intelligent, ambitious and thoroughly offensive little heel. He was precisely the sort who should never have been permitted in any responsible capacity aboard a scientific vessel like the oceanographic survey tug *Cormorant* when she was in the process of investigating a find as important as the gigantic artifact which Dr. Hans Weigand had discovered in the six-mile abyss of Bartlett Deep just south of Cuba.

But Fortenay's publisher was a

Roger Dee! The name has a fine, myth-making flavor, hasn't it? You'd almost know that our ebullient author—his work has appeared in many magazines—would excel in just such superb fancy-free flights of humorous scientific fantasy as he has brought you here with a spectral chuckle.

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power among politicians as well as among publishers, so Fortenay was able to announce in his syndicated column that his readers would receive on-the-spot coverage of the investigation, and that no smoke-screen of scientific doubletalk should keep the truth from them.

The announcement was greeted with great interest, since various disturbing rumors concerning the nature of Dr. Weigand's discovery were already in circulation. Most of them—since Dr. Weigand himself was frankly unable to offer any clue as to their origin or purpose—were elaborated upon by Fortenay and his colleagues with less regard for truth than for dramatic effect.

As a consequence, the newspaper-reading public was torn between a number of equally improbable theories which supposed that:

Dr. Weigand's find was not an artifact at all; but a monstrous bubble of molten basalt blown up ages before by a subterranean volcano and frozen solid by contact with sea water. A patent impossibility, since the thing occurred in an area free of any early vulcanism and was, by accurate sonar measurement, a sharply-defined oblong body some six miles long, three miles wide and two miles high.

It was an artifact of recent construction, being nothing less than an undersea Russian submarine base built secretly during the Korean diversion and designed to obliterate the Americas under a rain of hydrogen bombs.

It was a colossal structure erected by the inhabitants of an antediluvian country like Atlantis and inundated by the waters of some prehistoric flood.

It was, despite Plato's insistence that that mythical land lay beyond the Pillars of Hercules, Atlantis herself.

It was neither of these but a self-sufficient city built by a naturally marine race of men who had taken a divergent line of evolution and who might, for all anyone knew, be plotting a war of conquest against the honest, industrious, amicable and God-fearing nations of topside humanity.

None of these, Fortenay pontificated, was likely. Only one fact could be accounted certain, he added with clarion determination, and that Fortenay himself, armed with the invincible power of the press, would Find Out.

And Fortenay did, because Fortenay never let his readers down.

By luck, the journalist boarded the *Cormorant* just in time to keep his promise, for the tug's straining winch was in the process of swinging from her deck the quartz-glass bathysphere which Dr. Weigand had designed for plumbing the Bartlett Deep.

Fortenay's appearance was a

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source of instant consternation to Dr. Weigand's staff, who had been at their business long enough to know public-relations trouble when they saw it. Promptly they shifted the problem of Fortenay's disposition upward through the chain of seniority to Dr. Weigand himself.

The old oceanographer, in answer to their frantic calls over his bathysphere telephone, unscrewed the circular hatch of his quartz-glass ball and put out his head much after the fashion of a bearded and bifocaled bear peering from his winter den. He made a desperate attempt to close the hatch when he recognized Fortenay, but Fortenay was not to be denied.

"Hold everything!" said Fortenay, in effect. "I am here, in the interests of God and country and twenty million newspaper readers, to investigate this investigation."

Dr. Weigand protested the interruption of his work, and Fortenay invoked the power of the press. Worse, he threatened the good doctor with the personal wrath of Fortenay. His logic was wonderfully cogent.

Dr. Weigand's project depended largely upon government subsidy, and Congress controlled such subsidies. The people controlled Congress, and Fortenay controlled public opinion.

"I'll have them screaming for your head on a pike," Fortenay swore. And Dr. Weigand, who had lived long enough to understand that Fortenay could do just that, reluctantly surrendered.

Fortenay was a tyrannical little heel, but he possessed a certain amount of physical courage. "I'm going down with you, Wiggy," he said, "and see this Lost World shanty for myself."

And Fortenay went down, because he was confident that he would come up again. . . .

Their descent into Bartlett Deep would have been enthralling to Dr. Weigand without Fortenay's company, and deadly dull to Fortenay without the doctor's. As it developed, Dr. Weigand could only moon like a distracted bruin on his leather bathysphere seat and peer miserably out at the marine wonders rising past his eyes, while Fortenay occupied himself with assessing the oceanographer's motives in pursuing an investigation so hare-brained.

For Fortenay did not believe for a minute that it was an artifact which Dr. Weigand had discovered, but a natural and therefore profitless formation. His suspicions were confirmed when he learned that the bathysphere could descend no more than a mile into the six-mile basin of Bartlett Deep without being crushed—to borrow a simile from Fortenay's ready stock—like an eggshell under the mounting pressure of water above.

Since the thing at the bottom stood only two miles in height,

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it followed by simple subtraction that three miles of dark and watery distance must remain between the cameras of the observer and their target. The only possible inference was that Dr. Weigand had built the bathysphere for the sole purpose of titillating popular interest and so justifying a request for additional funds for his project.

"It gets your name in the papers," Fortenay said with caustic irony. "And makes it easier to bilk the taxpayers next time. And if you're forced to admit it's only another volcanic chunk then your project will still be in the black, won't it?"

The unexpected attack, to tap Fortenay's gift for simile again, knocked the oceanographer for a devastating loop. His reasoning had been much as Fortenay guessed, though the difficulty of maintaining a truly important scientific project without government aid had seemed more than enough to justify the trifling subterfuge.

The doctor saw his mistake now, and while the bathysphere sank lower and lower into the darkening water he sought frantically for a loophole of escape from the disaster he foresaw in tomorrow's newspapers.

He might have saved himself the effort. Fortenay had already headlined his report, and his only interest now was in the sport of baiting his victim . . .

The exposure of fakes, quacks, mountebanks and myths, Fortenay declared, was his specialty. He offered copious proof.

"There was that pig-tailed brat in Arkansas," Fortenay said, "who claimed she could levitate pianos and start fires by crossing her eyes. The local papers had half the country believing it until I went down and bluffed her into a test demonstration with arc lights and a TV hookup. Maybe you caught that show—the act was a gyp, and I showed the world. You never heard from *her* again, did you?"

Dr. Weigand recalled the incident, and thought with some commiseration that the nervous breakdown which followed the neurotic child's exposure to Fortenay's baying attack might have been responsible for the loss of any poltergeist power.

"And those three jokers in Ohio," enumerated Fortenay, "who claimed they found a dead flying-saucer pilot. I bought it from them and proved it was only a carnival baboon dipped in laundry blueing. I got those jerks three years for fraud."

And here am I, thought Dr. Weigand, *an honest man and a respected scientist, about to suffer a punishment even more terrible at the hands of this trumpeting little ferret because I have sought to keep my project alive. He will shout my little indiscretion from his journalistic housetop and my*

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reputation and my job will go like fog before the wind. I will be discredited and my Anna will hang her head before the neighbors and my little Karen and Wilhelmina, who know nothing of it, will be jeered in the schoolyard. . . .

"*Ach,*" said the doctor, who seldom said *ach.* "It should not happen to a dog. Not yet even to a hyena!"

"—dowser in Oklahoma who charged fees to locate water," Fortenay ran on relentlessly. "He got away with that racket until I went out with some geological experts and a cameraman and showed him up. After that—"

After that, thought Dr. Weigand, *the poor fellow's gift was destroyed along with his confidence, and there was nothing.*

But the doctor's commiseration rang hollow even to himself, for it had occurred to him suddenly that it might not be necessary, after all, for this thing to happen to him and to Anna and Karen and Wilhelmina.

It would mean the end of Hans Weigand, of course, but his project would go on. He would be not a heel but a hero, and his family would be pensioned instead of pilloried. And what is death to a true scientist, when the man must die anyway but his reputation may live forever?

"—trouble is that people are so *gullible,*" Fortenay was expounding. (He pronounced it *gullable,* not that it mattered.) "They'll believe anything they're told as long as it has its roots in some old myth or legend handed down to them. They'll believe it if their fathers believed it, because they're fools."

He leaned across the cramped cell of the bathysphere and tapped the doctor on the knee.

"And do you know why people are fools, Wiggy? Because scientists *teach* them to be fools. Every superstition that people cling to was handed down from the time when wise men—the scientists of the day—taught it as gospel truth. Scientists are always making some kind of mistake, and the people foot the bill.

"A few years ago they made an error in some law about variable stars, a little bobble of a hundred per cent, and now they're saying the whole universe is twice as big as they'd been teaching.

"And do you know why scientists make stupid mistakes, and why they change their stories ever so often? Because they're fools too, and thieves into the bargain. Like you, Wiggy."

"I *must* do it," Dr. Weigand muttered. "Yes, I think certainly. It is the only way."

"Scientists are always starting myths," Fortenay gabbled, never dreaming of what went on behind the doctor's bifocals. "Take the legend of Atlantis, for instance."

The soft sheen of undersea

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light, like a patina of moonbeams filtered through deepest jade, was lost on him. The deep-water cold of Bartlett Deep that crept through the quartz shell of the bathysphere troubled him not at all.

"When a hairy old Greek named Plato wrote a book about Atlantis, everybody believed him because he was a scientist," Fortenay went on. (He pronounced it *Platto.*) "And now you pop up with a story about an undersea artifact—you might as well have come right out and called it a building—and what you're really trying to do is to start another crazy myth about a drowned civilization right here in our own backyard. That's the way these lies start."

He might have enlarged further upon his topic if Dr. Weigand had not stood up suddenly, like Samson in the temple, and yanked an innocent-seeming lever that disconnected the bathysphere from its overhead cable and let it drop like a stone toward the bottom of Bartlett Deep.

"Perhaps we start a little myth of our own, you and I," Dr. Weigand said as the telephone wires ripped loose. "Perhaps our friends up there will say to the newspapers that a sea monster came up and ate us, *nicht wahr?*"

Fortenay, of course, sprang upon the burly old oceanographer in a frenzy, and of course accomplished nothing.

Dr. Weigand took him by the shoulders and replaced him in his leather seat.

"We can neither of us do anything now," the good doctor said. "Sit, Mr. Fortenay, and tell me more about how you do not believe in myths."

Fortenay sat, but said nothing, for there was nothing to say.

Fortenay sat for a long while and breathed hard through his thin inquisitive nose while the bathysphere sank down and down into gathering green darkness. After a time it dawned upon him with a great rush of relief that Fortenay the columnist, whose facile wit daily entertained twenty millions of people, could not possibly die in any such fantastic fashion.

It simply couldn't happen. He was the victim of a peculiarly vivid dream—three-dimensional, complete with technicolor and tactile sensations, but still a dream—from which he must waken shortly.

But there was no denying that it was a horribly convincing dream. The monstrous artifact he had come to investigate—it really *was* a building of some sort, he saw now, and not a ruin at all—rose closer and closer until its vast top spread out under the bathysphere like a mossy green plateau.

A random eddy of current caught the bathysphere and pushed it gently outward as it sank, so that it missed the edge

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and fell on toward the bottom, and the barnacled wall that slid up to tower over Fortenay was as blank and final as the rim of the world.

They were approaching the bottom of Bartlett Deep when they saw the first gigantic splashes of lettering, emblazoned like the heraldic script of a Titan across the face of the wall. The doctor was beside himself with the frenzy of his discovery, but could make nothing of it because the wall was much too near. It was like looking at a billboard from a distance of six inches, and so Dr. Hans Weigand passed the last moments of his life as he had lived the greater part of it, in disappointment and frustration.

Fortenay, bemused by his dream, took no such interest. Actually he felt a little smug that he should have had the acumen to recognize it for what it was even before he woke and that he should have been able, even in the grip of a nightmare, to face down a big-time myth-making scientist like Wiggy on his own ground.

All this would vanish soon, he told himself, even as the first sudden tracery of strain-fissures appeared in the quartz-glass shell of the bathysphere. A dream is a myth and a myth is a dream, and he would wake up soon—

The bathysphere burst, crushed, as Fortenay would have said, like an eggshell.

Fortenay woke, not from a dream but from an existence. He found himself standing on a smooth floor of shell before a vast and featureless building whose facade towered mistily up out of sight. Little eddies of current bore tiny, feathery creatures that brushed past and through him, glowing phosphorescently. Glittering fragments of the shattered bathysphere fell like a rain of outsized diamonds about his feet.

Dr. Weigand stood beside him, bifocaled eyes speculative, his whiskers comfortably afloat like seaweed in the green water.

"I think we go inside when the door opens," the good doctor said.

"Inside?" echoed Fortenay. "To what?"

"To a myth," said Dr. Weigand. A myth that was made for such lost ones as you and I."

Fortenay saw the legend then. It was far up on the facade, above the doorway, and at such a distance the quaint antique script, like its meaning, was wonderfully and fearfully clear: DAVY JONES' LOCKER

The door that opened led downward and outward, companionwise, to a green and enigmatic beyond.

"Let us go, my little friend," said Dr. Weigand. "It is better not to be sent for, I think."

And Fortenay went, because he had no choice.

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and a little child

by . . . Marcia Kamien

Only on Mars could children such as these walk proudly under the stars. How ungrateful seemed their bitter hatred of their teachers!

ON THE LAST day of school Professor Dayton looked with pleasure at his class. Fine men and women, all of them. If, the professor amended silently, one could call them "men" and "women." He, himself, preferred their new name: *Martians.*

They sat in front of him, ranged in rows, twenty-year-olds stirring restlessly in their seats, as thousands of generations of pupils had done before them.

Only this classroom was a bit different.

In the first place, Profesor Dayton sat under a small glass dome with a dashboard of dials and metres directly at his elbow. His class, on the other hand, sat in the open air.

Now and then a head turned to gaze through one of the windows at the dull, brick-colored desert land outside, the low, gently rolling hills that quietly told the story of Mars' long and ancient past.

"Today is your last day of class," Professor Dayton said into the portable microphone. "You

Marcia Kamien is new to science fiction. It is not often that a story of such brilliance arrives on our desk unsolicited, and our surprise was even greater when the author informed us in an accompanying letter she wasn't quite sure we'd buy it. We are afraid she just does not understand editors. We know quite a few, and they all agree that there are stories which would never stay forever clipped to a rejection slip.

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have been good students, all of you, a credit to your mother-Earth. Now, I should like to—"

He stopped abruptly. One of the young men was standing, waving him to silence. Dayton knew him well, a bright eager youngster who called himself Bar. All of the others turned their faces to him as to a natural leader.

Leader! Dayton felt a shiver of apprehension. How long had he half-expected this? Since the day, seven years before, when they had all changed their names? Or even earlier, when they had begun to notice?

He stared out, directly at Bar, keeping his face expressionless. *We're powerless,* he thought, *powerless against them.* Bar was six feet and eight inches tall, and his height was not unusual in his group. His skin had been burnt through the years by an unhampered Mars sun to a russet-brown; and out of the saddle color, his blue eyes gleamed like sapphires.

Bar was broad, broader than any man had ever been, with a huge rib-cage to take in the thin air of Mars. Around his waist was fastened a one-piece garment of light-weight cloth which was his costume night and day; for Bar, like the others now gazing up at him almost in adoration, had a thick layer of skin that hardly felt the piercing cold of a Martian night. Thinking of this, Dayton shivered a little in his warm woolen robes.

For the hundredth time, Dayton told himself: "We did *too* good a job." He was thinking of the master-plan that had made a new race of Martians out of ordinary Earth children, the plan which had started twenty years before.

Dayton had looked at the fifty-three babies two decades before with mixed emotions of hope and fear, sharing the misgivings that had plagued the other scientists and teachers. It had been a daring idea, this patient dream that was now reaching fulfillment. First the babies would have to become accustomed gradually to the thin atmosphere, and lower gravity of Mars. Then, as adults, they would be able to march at will over the planet, breathing freely.

Dayton's immediate superior, Dr. L'Hai of Evolutionary-Biogenetics, had voiced the half-felt sentiment, as the two of them, so long ago, had watched the young children crawling in their elaborately constructed play-pen of glass. The dial on the outside showed that the infants were receiving only a small percentage less oxygen than was normally found on Earth. The dial also pointed to a temperature of 58°, comfortable but cool for such young children.

"Look at them," L'Hai said proudly. "They hardly know the difference. In three months—" with a gesture toward the dials

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—"a bit lower temperature, a bit thinner air. Slowly they will develop until they will be completely free of *our* prison. *And they will build Mars!*"

Dayton gazed around him at the flat countryside and the time-eroded mountains some five hundred miles distant, looming so clearly in the thin air they seemed barely fifty feet away.

For acre upon acre, the flatland was unbroken, save by scrubs of a dingy greenish-blue hue and the ever-present crawling, red-tinged lichen. Not far from where the two scientists stood, there were three large plexi-glass bubbles, filled with oxygen: greenhouses containing vegetables, fruit, and stored protein foods.

But what drew Dayton's eye, and interest more than anything else was far off. In the distance, one could discern the outlines of a half-toppled building, its crumbling contours jagged against the deep-blue sky. It was an old building of the dead Martians—the Martians who had embellished their civilization with huge, ornately carved stones; and then had died, leaving only the enormous blocks behind on a desolate waste land as mute testimony that once they had lived proudly.

"Our children *will* rebuild Mars," Dayton murmured to his colleague. "They will pick up that torch, and rekindle it!"

Dr. L'Hai shrugged the thought away. He cared little for the extinct generations of Martians, only for the new one, budding carefully under the hands of Earth-science. And then the air in their head-covering plastic bubbles had run short, and they had returned clumsily in the vague and always-alien atmosphere toward their bubble-home, where the generators made air that was always fresh and breathable.

And now here was Bar, one of those babies grown, burnt by an alien sun, and an alien defiance. "We did much too good a job," the professor thought again, and waited for the young man to speak.

"You're looking at me," Bar boomed. He didn't need a microphone; his resonant voice carried easily. "I'm different from you now, aren't I, Professor?" He didn't wait for an answer. "Yes, I'm different. We're *all* different. We can breathe this air while *you* must stay in your domes. We are strong and big. *You,* and all your kind—are weak and puny.

"You made one mistake, Professor Dayton. You carefully nurtured us, fifty-three kids, so that we could breathe and walk on Mars as free men. You did it, Professor, and it was a marvelous job.

"But now, esteemed Professor, we want to be *free.* We don't want to walk on our planet for Earthlings. We are Martians. . . ."

There was a murmur of assent from the others.

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"We are bronze-skinned Martians," Bar went on. "And Mars is *ours*, by all rights. Earth may be our mother, but Mars is our father. And, like all good sons, we stay with our father!"

A cheer went up, and again Dayton shivered. His mind flashed back and for the second time he asked himself: "How long have I half-expected this?"

The children were all seven and a half years old, and they had made remarkable progress. One month earlier, they had been taken out of their air-bubbles. All the scientists had watched them with trepidation, but nothing had gone wrong. The children had not even noticed the difference. Their little lungs had already swelled and they inhaled and exhaled the vague air as they might have inhaled the normal air on Earth.

They were still bundled tightly against the cold, but—for the first time—they were permitted to run around. They could actually run; they didn't leap and spring like so many pogo-sticks, as did the older men. They ran, they played, and the heavy little muscles in their young legs held them down.

Around them were always three men, supervising. Dayton was one of the supervisors that day. Bar was the ring-leader, only then his name had been David Lombardy. He was a sharp one, the first to discover that they could out-run, out-leap, out-maneuver their elders.

"Catch me!" he taunted Dayton, evading the latter's grip at every turn. "Catch me, if you can!"

And the others took it up, laughing and screaming and running helter-skelter.

Dayton had forgotten all the others. David Lombardy was his nemesis and he must catch him. He raced across the dry baked ground after the little boy, red with frustration and exertion.

At last he had clutched the little shoulder, and without rational thought, had shaken the boy, his eyes clouded with rage, biting back the words that threatened to pour out.

Damn them! Damn this boy, in particular! When did he discover . . . how will we ever keep them under control? They're so young, such kids, to have so much power over us. We might have known this would happen!

Then David Lombardy had looked up at the anger-ridden features of his teacher. "Bubble-head!" he laughed, pointing to the globe which held Dayton's air. "Bubble-head!"

The other children had picked up the cruel name immediately. Like all seven-year-olds, they had little sense of kindness in them. They were just young animals. But they *knew*, then, that they had an advantage. They knew they could breathe where Dayton and

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the others never could, and never would.

By punishment, the scientists had managed to repress the name of "Bubble-head." It had never been uttered outright since that day. But, always, Dayton felt that the growing children remembered, and remembered clearly.

Was it since *that* day? Or was it since the day when, at age thirteen, David Lombardy had walked up to him and said: "We look different. We talk different. You wanted us to be different, didn't you?"

"Yes, David, that's true." Even then, Dayton had felt a tremor of something half-expected, half-feared. "Why?"

"Well, then, you can't expect us to have the same names as all of you. We want our *own* names, different from any others."

Dayton paused, gazing out at the boy's earnest face. At thirteen, he seemed to recall from some psychology book, all children liked to live in a make-believe world. Here was a make-believe world come true for David Lombardy and his mates. Why not let them change their names? Would it hurt?

"Very well Da—what is your name now?"

The boy's mouth had curved in a knowing smile. "Bar. That's my name. You call me Bar . . . Professor." The last word came almost as an after-thought. Then, Bar had turned and walked out, still smiling secretly.

Yes, I knew then, Dayton thought. I knew that day that no matter how much they grew up, they would never change their names back again. Yet, they must be taught only so much at a time. He could not be impatient; he must not ask Da—*Bar* point-blank. And since then, every day he had waited for this day, for what he knew must happen, and what must not happen.

"All right, Bar, what is it you want?" he said aloud. A bare minute had passed since the cheer had gone up, had shivered in the cool air, and had died quietly in the corners of the large room.

Bar's voice was triumphant, and his chest swelled as he spoke: "It's good you feel that way, Professor, because we knew we would win. We want no more of you puny Earthlings. We want no more of your science that thinks it knows all, yet cannot even walk without a bubble on its head. We want no more of teachers who teach, yet cannot run without bouncing into the air like mountain-goats. You have given us all you can; now you only take away. Go . . . get out . . . go away from Mars where no one belongs but us. Go Home, Earthmen!"

"Go Home Earthmen!" The shout from fifty-three thoats was almost deafening.

"And if you don't," Bar shouted

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above the din, "we'll destroy all your domes, and you'll die like the fish out of water that you are. So get out, *go*—and leave us to raise future generations of *real* Martians. Mars for the Martians!"

"Mars for the Martians!" echoed the other voices, the amplified shouts swelling out the windows into the red desert.

Dayton felt only dull shock. He had known so well. Almost as if he had written a twenty-year-long script, and now the final lines were being spoken at last. Still, there was much he must say before they left.

"Wait a little, Bar. We'll leave, but first there are many things you should—"

"No, Professor! *Go now!*" A mighty fist doubled, and a large dark-brown finger pointed out the window. The professor followed the finger's direction with his eyes, until they lighted upon the slim bullet-shaped ship in the near distance—the space ship, *Albatross,* lying securely berthed in a hammock of sand that shimmered eerily in the clashing sunlight.

That night, the fifty-three Martians herded their former teachers into the *Albatross.* The scientists stood at the video screen in the nose of the ship, and watched the greenhouses, the ranches, the home-dwellings, all the marks of Earth, being wrecked with fiery precision. Then, their beloved charts, the carefully-written notes, the photograph albums, everything that told of the slow growth of fifty-three Earthling babies to huge-chested Martians . . . all these, piled in a heap, to be ignited.

Someone—Bar, Dayton thought—took the torch and threw it on the paper. In the clear cold air, the books took fire slowly, tiny blue flames licking up through them, and then, suddenly, a brief, intense glare of red and orange and yellow. In the firelight, the brown faces looked almost savage.

The pilot shrugged his shoulders. "There'll be a war in twenty-five years," he said.

"No," Dayton said softly, and behind him, the others nodded silently. "We have no need to worry."

The pilot looked at him strangely, then shrugged. Ah well, he had a job: to get them home and warn the Earth government.

The silver ship took off with hardly a sound from the dim sands of Mars. In three minutes, it was a tiny star, flickering in the skies with billions of other winking pinpoints of light. And down below, the new, self-appointed citizens of Mars danced around the still glowing ashes of their history . . .

Dayton got the inter-space call five years later. He knew what it was. He had awaited it with the same patience and silence with which he had awaited Bar's speech on Mars.

It was Bar, of course, and his

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voice, though loud, had lost its fiery timbre. "Professor—" he began.

"Never mind, I know," Dayton said quietly. "You bred, didn't you? And you found out what I could have told you, had you not been so young, so impatient. It was suicide to destroy those domes. Oh, Bar, what a pity! To delude yourselves into thinking that we, mere scientists, mere men, could create a brand-new race! Bar, we merely trained you and adapted you to your environment."

"We know that now."

"Your wives gave birth. But the babies—were white and weak and thin-chested. They were Earth babies, just as you are really made-over Earthmen. And the babies choked. And they died."

It was a whisper. "Yes. They died."

The professor almost smiled. "And, *now*, Bar?"

"We are still children. We need our mother. Will you forgive us and come back?" Bar said humbly.

Now Dayton smiled openly. "Leave the creating of races to God, Bar. Yes, we'll come back. A mother always goes back to care for her wayward children."

He cut off, then, and eagerly began punching buttons which would summon them all back. Back to teach another generation of Martians!

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the recalcitrant

by . . . Evelyn Goldstein

He was proud of his shining strength and his home in the bee-loud glade. Why did men seek only his destruction?

THIS GOLDEN DAY was pollen-scented, warmed by the mid-summer sun. Out in the garden the breeze was slight. And a great furred honeybee circled and dipped, touching the vivid azaleas, drinking the heart of the iris, and swiftly rising to the purple rhododendron cups. Dark green ivy twined the porch railing of the trim white cottage.

From behind the curtains of fragile glasseen Jim Simson peered out at his garden with caution and longing. He could almost feel the moist rich soil in his fingers, could almost smell the blossoms through the tight closed windows. In all weathers, on brilliant days and blue and silver nights, he and Amelia had worked the garden. Now the hours of planting and tending were done.

He raised haunted eyes to the hills beyond. Between the young pines on the sweet sloped breasts he could see the pale thread of road. Momentarily, where a curve brought it into view, the sun glinted on the metal helicar that moved purposefully toward him.

We're convinced that only a woman could have written this story. There is a heartbreaking quality of suspense to it—of tenderness diffused through a web of high poetry. The compassion is wholly womanly, but the breath of a fierce vitality stirs in it too. Evelyn Goldstein has captured the tragedy of the not-quite-human with a deftness extraordinary.

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They'll be here in an hour, he thought. *And then they'll take and destroy what I am. And I'll lose Amelia forever.*

That was the thing he could not bear. Worse than torment it seemed, worse than destruction itself.

In agony he turned. The cool comfort of his house made fantastic the knowledge within him. There in the corner stood the fine cherrywood desk he had made. Every bit of the polished dark furniture, every section had been sanded and grained and carved by his hands. And all the fabricing—rugs and pillows, delicate covers and hangings—all Amelia's handiwork.

They two, starting from bare black earth had built this home, foundations and beams, studs and floorboards, shingles and shutters, outside and in, their work, their love.

He thrust out his hands, and moved in blind panic to the arch of the kitchen.

Amelia looked up from the work table. The soft tan of sun was deep on her cheeks, and her clear green eyes kindled at sight of him.

"I'm up to the last bouquet," she smiled and indicated the straw basket that was full of neatly tied herbs ready for Jim to take to the market.

His long-drawn breath was a silent prayer: *"Let me never forget the spice of this room, the morning light on her dark curled hair.*

Then he groaned. With a stride he caught her warm curved body to him. In her hands the last bouquet was crushed between them, filling his nostrils with fragrance of thyme and mint and coriander leaves.

At last he held her away, his hands tight on her shoulders, bare and brown in the brief sundress.

"There are men coming for me," he said. "I've got to run and hide. They'll search, and wait, but eventually they'll leave. Then I'll come back. But we'll have to go away from here. We'll have to start again under other names, somewhere else."

Her anxious eyes searched his face. "Jim, what have you done?"

"Done? Why, I've done nothing," he said.

And that was true. It was not what he had done. It was what he *was.*

"I'll go with you, Darling. We'll hide together."

He shook his head. "It's not you they want. I'll have a better chance alone."

He lifted the basket of herbs. "When they come tell them I've just gone to the market."

"But where *will* you go?"

"Out to the hills. I'll come back when they're gone."

He kissed her quickly, and went out knowing she was standing at the back door threshold, strain-

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ing to see him till he could no longer be seen . . .

There was a swift brook in the woods beyond his cultivated acres. Into it he scattered the herbs to be dispersed by the dancing water. The basket he broke in his strong brown hands and sent the pieces after the flowers. Then he took off his shoes, cuffed his pants to his knees and waded across the brook to the other side.

Pine nettles and small twigs gave under his stride. He never felt the pain of angled stones where he trod. He walked a long time, without stopping, and his breath did not become labored though his path was always upward.

When he reached the clear crest of the hill he looked down to the patchwork valley where he lived. He saw his house, a green-topped miniature fashioned like a jewel in the pastoral setting.

But the flaw in the jewel was the ominous helicar at the gate of the house.

He sat in the tall grass, pulling his knees up to his chest. He clasped his hands about his legs, and prepared himself for the long vigil ahead.

The sky became colored with sunset tints. He saw all the beauty without lifting his head. Cool breezes of dusk blew upon him. The sky became darker; the moon increased in brilliance. In the moonight the metal car was silvered. During all the hours he had watched not one figure had emerged from the house. In a waiting game they were persistent and tireless.

He rose at last, and stretched. He saw his hands before him, taught and strong, finely formed. On impulse he rubbed his chin, touched his cheek. How smooth and hard the flesh, how bronzed his powerful body.

Suddenly he raised himself, stretching as high as he could, feeling the pull of well coordinated muscles. He smiled almost joyfully. His was a body to prize.

He whirled and started to run noiselessly, and without hurry over the tabled clearing. Where the terrain sloped he did not brake his speed, and momentum carried him faster down among the slim white birches, and fragrant firs.

He ran like a football player, in and out among the trees, leaping boulders and small streams, or plunging recklessly into crystal cold waters.

Where else was there another such as he—to run and run, and never tire? To dodge and twist, and speed over rough stones with no pain lancing up through him?

Was it his strength they feared?

"They'll never catch me," he vowed.

Then he went back up the sloping hill to his post at the crest.

The helicar was no longer standing in the road, and the lights of his house had ceased to shine. Only the moon flushed out

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shadows of the trees, and his silent dwelling.

They are gone, he thought.

The easy victory surprised him, and he wanted to sing for the relief of it. More quickly now than he had run in his prideful ascent of the slope he turned his steps homeward.

At the back door Amelia was waiting. In the night wind her skirt fluttered, and tendrils of blue-black hair whipped back.

"Jim," her lips were black moonlight, and her eyes shone with bright anguish. "Jim. Why did you come back?"

And then, behind her, he saw the armed men in their leather belted uniforms. Before he could retreat their searchbeams impaled him.

"*Stand,* Jim Simson!"

All hope of escape was gone.

They came to either side of him, stun weapons levelled, and led him to the shadows of the house where they had hidden their helicar.

He tried to turn to see Amelia as they forced him to walk between them to the back seat of the car.

She was lovely, and lonely in the moonlight, a figure lost and bewildered. How he wished he could go back, and crush her in his arms again.

Hours later, in the subdued glow of the office of United Medics, he cried:

"Why can't you let me alone? Why can't you forget about me? I changed my name. I concealed myself—a farmer among farmers. Why did you hunt me down?"

To the right of the door stood the two guards who had brought him. Their faces were impassive, as was the face of the man at the desk, the man named Dr. Crawsin.

He asked Jim: "Why didn't you answer our letters requesting you to present yourself for this interview. Why did you make it necessary for us to use force?"

"Did you really expect me to come here voluntarily—to be destroyed!"

"*Destroy* is, I think, an ill-chosen word, Roger—er—" he glanced at the record open on his desk, "Jim Simson, as you renamed yourself. We use a different term—reconverted."

Jim's mouth twisted: "And," he added bitterly, "after you've 'reconverted' me, what will become of Amelia, my wife?"

Again the doctor glanced at his record, "Ah, yes, your wife. You've been married—"

"Twenty years."

"Twenty years," the doctor mused. A flicker of interest came into his eyes, "And in these years did you ever tell her? Or hint?"

"No!" he rose with a shout. The guards leveled their guns. After a moment Jim sank back to his seat. "Amelia doesn't know." His voice was dull. "She thinks I'm just like her. It's better that way."

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The doctor's voice softened: "Didn't she ever wonder why you never had children?"

"Wonder? Of course. At first. But I saw to it that she was kept too busy to care." Pride came into his tone. "We built our home ourselves, up from the ground. Made everything in it. Tilled our acres of land."

His eyes gleamed, and it was almost with spite that he said: "Can you do that? Can you go without food? Can you go without sleep? Can you work without tiring? Can you cut yourself and not feel pain? And heal yourself?"

Triumph made Jim's throat swell. He wanted to reach across and lift the other in his arms, just to show what strength he had, how wonderfully powered he was. "Look at me. How old would you say I was."

Was there envy in the doctor's eyes? "Twenty-five, I'd say. If I didn't know you were forty, as the records show."

"And you, Doctor, must be seven or eight years younger. Look at yourself. Tired lines, gray at the temple—your body a prey to disease, and to aches. Doesn't it make you jealous that I am what I am, and you what you are?"

The doctor got up abruptly and motioned to the guards. Jim rose, protesting frantically as they closed in, and took his arms.

"You *are* jealous! That's why you want to destroy me. Jealous! *Jealous!*"

"Jealous, Jim Simson? Hardly." The doctor smiled pityingly just before the guards led Jim away. "You see, I have two children."

They stripped him in a small closed room, and prepared him for the irrevocably final step. They put him on a rolling stretcher, strapping him down at his chest, legs and arms. The bright narrow ceiling sailed over him.

They wheeled him into a large amphitheatre with blue-white lights. White garbed figures swam into view, their faces masked. One bent over him.

"Hello, Roger MacComb."

He stared into keen blue eyes. "Dr. Tiel!" He recognized the man, and a great relief surged through him. He lowered his voice confidentially: "Stop them, Doctor. They want to reconvert me."

"Of course," the doctor said. "Didn't I promise it to you—twenty years ago? Surely, you haven't forgotten my promise?"

"Forgotten?" Bitterly, he recalled that other time. Then, as now, he had been strapped to the operating table. But then he had been a poor shattered thing. Forgotten? He had never forgotten those frenzied pleas of years back: "Promise the change will only be temporary. Promise you'll find a way."

"Now," the doctor said: "I'm

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keeping that promise. We *did* find the way."

"Dr. Tiel." Jim's chest heaved, "I've changed my mind. I don't want reconversion. I want to be me—as I am now—as you made me!"

The masked man stared down at him. "They told me about this." His voice was almost sad. "They told me you were recalcitrant. I couldn't believe it."

"But it's true." His voice was only a whisper. "There's Amelia. I love her. What will happen to her?"

"Your wife? Why, she will be reassigned. There are other tasks—in our factories—our farms. Her memory of you and of your marriage will be erased. We aren't barbarians, you know."

"Not barbarians?" His laugh was raw. "Not cruel to force reconversion on me? And what about my memories? Can you erase them?"

"No, but you will adjust. You did before." His tone turned ironic. "You didn't call me cruel when your arms were gone, and your body shot to pieces. I was your saviour then, your healer. You couldn't thank me enough, or praise me. You—and all the men like you that I salvaged out of the Great War."

His eyes blazed at Jim. "Only half a million of you left. Half a million men out of a world of billions. I took those with minds and hearts and gave them new bodies. And almost all of them used those new bodies to work in my Body Parts Bank, helping me experiment and recreate the real thing. Except the few—like you—who ran to hide out on farms, in caves of the mountains, even in sailing boats.

"I even manufactured wives for you—moving, talking, mechanical dolls with memory tapes for minds—just to keep you from loneliness till the time when I found the way to give back the bodies you had lost. And now when I give you the chance for the greatest gift—the chance to bear children, to repopulate our dying world—you hide! You reject it!"

Dr. Tiel ended on a thunderous note. He glared at Jim. Then made an angry imperious gesture.

From behind and above someone lowered an anaesthetic cone. Jim turned and twisted. He fought the straps. But inexorably they brought the cone down over his face. It muffled him so that his words came through, muted and broken:

"But I don't want to be human again. Please . . . Please . . . I don't want to be human . . ."

After a while his voice died. His wonderful android body gave a final twitch of protest. And then was still.

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top secret boomerang

by . . . Richard E. Smith

The Earthman had to die—for how else could Aratok triumph?

ARATOK-SHA CROSSED the gleaming plastic floor and sat behind the immense desk. He lit a cigar, blew thin jets of lavender smoke through his three nostrils and leaned back in the swivel chair.

"T-48," he thought clearly.

The hidden, telepathically-controlled mechanism caught the command, and an entire wall of the room abruptly showed a curvacious woman performing an exotic dance. The glittering, diaphanous dress, and semblance of multidimensions made the show interesting but Aratok-Sha gave another telepathic command: "T-49."

The huge video screen whirled for a second and then pictured a wrecked spaceship on the surface of a pock-marked moon. He gave the extra-sensory code number to turn the video set off, interrupting the announcer's voice in the middle of a word.

The controlled video worked perfectly. In the next several minutes, he used the telepathic

When a G. I. Joe has been climbing up and down the hills of Korea for a solid year, warfare of any sort might well cease to figure in his plans for the future. But Richard Smith has the tough-fibered resilience of a true fighting author. An idea is an idea, and a story as powerful as this just had to get itself written. It's his first published yarn, and it does deal with warfare, though it's quite a leap from Korea to the shining stars.

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controls that operated the lights, doors and matter-transmitters scattered about the floor. With the mind-controlled teleporters, he was able to bring to his office chairs, filing cabinets, anything that was normally needed during the day and he didn't have to move a tentacle.

At last, Aratok-Sha was satisfied. This was one of the ultimatess: a thought-controlled machine. He wondered why science hadn't developed such a machine earlier.

The Larkonian's stubby antennae wriggled in bafflement as he remembered another puzzle. Why had the Earthman offered to let him install the telepathically-controlled devices in his office?

Granted, the devices made his work immensely easier but there was no reason for the Earthman to be so generous even considering their many years of friendship.

Perhaps the Earthman was using him. In time, the Earthman would patent and sell his inventions. That would call for demonstrations. And then, the Earthman would invite other Earthmen to see Aratok-Sha's office. It made sense, he decided. At his own expense, he had provided a demonstration room for the Earthman. Subtle!

A quick glance at the chrono on the desk informed him it was past the time for Harrison's appointment.

As if Harrison had been reading his mind, he heard the matter-transmitter hum and looked up to see the Earthman's light blue tunic.

Aratok-Sha rose from his chair, pronounced carefully in the Earthman's language, "Greetings, Harrison."

Harrison slumped in a chair, "Greetings, Aratok-Sha. How are the little Shas?"

"Fine, thank you."

"I have another invention to show you tonight, Aratok-Sha. Telepathically controlled anti-gravity mechanisms."

"Indeed?"

"I have a woman's handbag fitted with an antigravity mechanism. Tonight, I'll bring it to this office from my laboratory by extra-sensory control."

Aratok-Sha waved his four tentacles in the air. "You mean it will fly through the air?"

"I hope so. This will be the first time I've tried it for such a long distance. You might call it a demonstration."

Aratok-Sha felt the green of his skin grow a shade darker. At first, he had thought the Earthman's appointment for the night would be for a friendly talk. But now, it was apparent the Earthman either wanted to test his invention, or to brag of his accomplishment.

Harrison concentrated on the telepathic code numbers that would reach the antigravity

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mechanism in the handbag miles away.

"It has started," he informed Aratok-Sha. "It should only take a few minutes."

Aratok-Sha gurgled somewhere in his alien organs and brown saliva dribbled from the corner of his mouth as he moved a gun from a drawer and placed it on the desk top.

Several miles away, an object rose from a littered workbench and hung suspended in the air for a moment before flying through an open window.

Harrison's eyes darted from the metallic weapon to the Larkonian's obsidian eye. And he knew.

His lips trembled uncontrollably and finally formed a faint, barely audible word, "Why?"

"Why am I going to kill you?" Aratok-Sha asked. "There are several reasons. The main one is that by killing you, I can obtain your inventions and help my planet."

Harrison studied the Larkonian, searching for some sign of emotion on the alien's body.

"H-How will that help your planet?" queried Harrison.

Aratok-Sha made a sound like the clearing of a human throat. "As you know, the planet of Larkon is a poor planet. Our only interplanetary export is a few agricultural products that sell as oddities on other planets. The income is very small. We lack the money and technology to build large cities, factories, transportation systems and so forth that other planets have. Compared to other races, my race is impoverished.

"If I obtain your inventions and patent them, other planets will loan Larkon the money to build factories to manufacture them. Then, Larkon can export the finished products and receive large incomes from every planet in the galaxy . . ."

Harrison closed his eyes. Mental pictures swam in his head as the alien's voice droned on, unheard. Aratok-Sha was right. Other planets would loan Larkon the money to build factories to manufacture telepathically controlled levitators, disintegrators, robots, and all the rest. Interplanetary law would prevent other planets from manufacturing the machines once Larkon had patented them.

Almost overnight, he realized, Larkon would become an industrial planet with some of the most valuable exports in existence. Then, Larkon would have a large income and be able to build the large cities and other luxuries that more civilized planets had . . .

Near the outskirts of Sakonsa, a hawk dove at the object, thinking it to be a small silvery bird. The "bird" eluded its grasp and continued on course. The black feathered hawk, invisible in the dark sky, circled and attacked the

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glittering object from the front, only to have one of its wings ruined and to hurtle towards the ground in gyrating motions—trying to sustain flight with the one wing still intact.

"I forgot to tell you, Harrison. Don't attempt any telepathic messages for help. As you know, I am also telepathic. I would know if you tried and stop you with this"—Aratok-Sha nudged the weapon on the desk with a tentacle—"before you succeeded."

Harrison swallowed rapidly. "You'll never get away with it, Aratok-Sha. You—"

"Why not?" The dry, mechanical voice of the alien made it sound like a statement. "I read your mind when you first entered this room. You told no one you were coming here tonight. Among the few dozen earthmen on the planet, not one knows you are a scientist or your real name. No one on Earth knows you are on this planet.

"You came to Larkon so no one would steal your inventions before you patented them, but it appears now as if you made a very efficient trap for yourself!"

The Larkonian equivalent of laughter grated across Harrison's nerves.

"If an Earthman by the name of Harrison is killed in a fire that totally destroys his house and possessions, no one will ask any questions."

Harrison searched his mind; felt alien telepathic tendrils there. There would be no chance to mentally contact the other earthmen on the planet and ask for help.

The object continued on its way under the pin-point stars and twin purple moons, the hawk's blood dripping from its smooth surface. Over the city, the object collided with a flier. It was knocked several yards to one side; then went on, unharmed.

"How will the other planets use telepathically controlled anti-gravity machines?" asked Aratok-Sha.

"There will be many practical uses," Harrison stated in a tremulous voice. "The tele-anti-grav mechanism is so small it can be fitted into any number of useful articles. For instance, the mech could be put in handbags—like the one in this demonstration—and if a woman forgot her handbag, leaving it in a store or someplace, she could use the extra-sensory controlled anti-gravity mechanism to float it through the air, direct it wherever she might be . . ."

Aratok-Sha fingered the blaster, turning it over and and over in his tentacles.

Harrison shivered uncontrollably. His mind busy with the telepathic directions, he couldn't hide his reactions. He fumbled in his pockets for a cigarette. It might calm his nerves.

"Can you read my mind right

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now?" he asked the alien. Harrison found a cigarette; lit it with the ring lighter on his finger. He leaned back in the chair and puffed orange smoke at the ceiling.

"Yes. You're concentrating on the telepathic code-numbers given the antigrav mech to control it."

"Right!" Harrison was glad he couldn't read the thoughts *deeper* in his mind. Obviously, the alienness of Aratok-Sha's mind imposed limitations on the degree of telepathic probing.

The object suddenly gained speed. Minutes later, it was over the squat stone cupolas of Sakonsa. It circled in wide, fast arcs as if looking for directions; then suddenly darted down towards a large domed building.

Silently, very silently it fell.

"I believe," muttered Aratok-Sha, "that after I kill you, I will place your body in the dis-basket." He pointed a tentacle at the large wastepaper basket.

Harrison stared at the large green-colored dis-basket at one side of the desk. Often they were huge baskets with a disintegrator platform in the bottom that would disintegrate anything that touched it: paper, metal or human flesh. Many criminals had succeeded with their crimes by dumping the body or evidence into a disintegrator.

With his eyes, Harrison measured the container; calculated he could easily be dumped in it if stood in an upright position when dead. Then, he could be disintegrated as he fell downward. Disintegrated into inconspicuous atoms, nothingness.

If that happened there would be no evidence to convict Aratok-Sha.

The color drained out of Harrison's face.

"Not a pleasant thought is it?" asked Aratok-Sha instantly. Harrison noticed a tenseness in the alien's antennae.

The metallic object slowed its fall to a gradual descent. It turned over and over in the air as if rehearsing some kind of acrobatics. Turning this way and that, the starlight glinted on its surface in tiny sparkles.

Harrison's mind whirled. He was going to die. He was going to be disintegrated into invisible particles, atoms.

In a way, he did not blame Aratok-Sha. The alien was a patriot. What was the life of one Earthman compared to the welfare of an entire planet? Harrison remembered the dirty mud huts the masses of Larkonians lived in; the almost total lack of entertainment, education and many luxuries that other planets had.

He remembered the starvation, the diseases, the poverty of the Larkonians. No, he could not blame Aratok-Sha for wanting to change that. And it would be changed if the planet Larkon had the patents to his recent inven-

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tions. Then, Larkon would have something valuable to sell and trade with other planets and the journey to prosperity would begin.

The shining object ended its descent and headed through the semi-darkness towards a large oval window in the huge domed building. It paused before the window, twisting and turning as if looking in every direction. Fourteen stories below, Larkonians moved along the street like crawling insects.

Harrison waited for Aratok-Sha to speak. When he didn't, he decided to break the silence himself.

"You don't have to kill me to get the inventions, Aratok-Sha. I'll *give* them to you. You can get the patents and then I wouldn't be able to prove anything even if I wanted to."

"Quiet."

Harrison contemplated his death. Pain? No, the pain would be a fleeting thing. But the *void* after death . . . That was what frightened him. The absence of everything. Never to walk, feel, see, hear, smell or think again. Never to laugh, cry or dance again. Never to . . .

"You won't harm my wife and little girl, will you?"

Silence.

"Please!"

The alien's silence was an answer in itself.

He remembered Evelyn's soft red lips and warm blue eyes. He remembered Judy's tiny pink fingers and golden hair. There was no way to stop the tears but his mouth did not tremble and he made no sound.

He had pleaded for their lives. Irrelevantly, he wondered if it was singularly necessary to die to save his wife and daughter, would he surrender his life?

With burning self-condemnation, he realized the answer was *no*.

He would not trade his entire physical universe because of intangible ecstatic emotions.

A startling thought: Although he might well have been with the majority in his decision, perhaps such a man as he did not deserve to live!

Bitterness was an acrid, tangible taste in his mouth.

The metal object stopped turning, glided slowly through the oval window.

"Think of your wife," Harrison continued. "Think of your child . . . little Shas. What would they—"

"Quiet!" Impatiently, the alien glared at the chrono on the desk. "How much longer will this demonstration last?"

"You want me to finish it so you can kill me?" Harrison thought but said aloud, "It'll be over soon. Very soon."

Aratok-Sha grew thoughtful. "How far are you bringing this object with the telepathically controlled antigrav mechanism?"

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"All the way from the laboratory," said Harrison softly. He glanced beyond Aratok-Sha's quivering tentacles.

"Have you very good telepathic controls on the gadget?"

"Very," Harrison admitted. "The antigrav mech has a miniature radar unit. It can dodge objects—stationary ones at least. The tele-antigrav controls are good. There are code control numbers to twist the object into different directions, to sort of aim it."

"Good!"

"Besides that, the speed can be controlled. A sudden forward movement . . . or a slowing down . . . or an increased speed . . ."

The object stopped a few feet from it's destination.

"When in cosmos is that handbag going to get here?" complained Aratok-Sha.

"Oh, it isn't a handbag."

The alien's features writhed with astonishment. "You said it was a handbag. I read your mind before you started the demonstration. There was a thought in your mind that you were going to use a woman's handbag for the demonstration!"

"I intended to use a handbag," Harrison said casually. "I started to use a handbag but when I saw you were going to kill me after the demonstration, I decided to use one of several other articles I had fixed with tele-antigrav devices. I was careful to keep the thought out of my mind so you wouldn't . . ."

"And which article did you pick?" asked a voice suddenly tinged with strange emotions.

"There was a wallet, a small suitcase, a gun, a knife . . ."

"And which did you choose?" repeated Aratok-Sha, a tentacle darting towards the weapon on the desk.

"The knife."

The metal knife sped across the few feet to Aratok-Sha's back, driven under a sudden burst of speed through Harrison's telepathic control.

Harrison stopped the antigrav mechanism when he saw the knife was driven in far enough.

Aratok-Sha sprawled across the desk top, brown liquid oozing from the wound in his back.

Seconds later, the alien's tentacles ceased their spasmodic twitching and were limp.

With a trembling hand, Harrison wiped beads of sweat from his face. Considering everything, it was a good demonstration.

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jackie sees a star

by Marion Zimmer Bradley

Jackie's star was his own secret discovery at first. But then—even Dr. Millikin became excited.

So YOU WANT to hear about the Edwards child? Oh, no, you don't get by with *that* one! You can just put on your hat again, and walk right back down those stairs, Mister. We've had too many psychologists and debunkers around here, and we don't want any more.

Oh—you're from the University? Excuse me, professor. I'm sorry. But if you *knew* what we've put up with, from reporters, and all kinds of crackpots . . . and it isn't good for Jackie, either. He's getting awfully spoiled. If you knew how many paddlings I've had to give that kid in just this past week.

His mother? Me? Oh, no! No, I'm just Jackie's aunt. His mother, my sister Beth, works at the Tax Bureau. Jackie's father died when he was only a week old. You know . . . he'd been in the Big Bombings in '64, and he never really got over it. It was pretty awful.

Anyhow, I look after Jackie while my sister works. He's a good little kid—spoiled, but what kid isn't, these days?

It was I who heard it first, as a

Marion Zimmer Bradley is a New Englander by speech, habits and tradition. Transplanted to Texas four years ago, she complains that she never has enough room to roam in the sand flats surrounding her dwelling. Could it be that, like Jackie, she much prefers the vast sweep of the Galactic universe—and a splendor which makes even Texas seem spatially minute?

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matter of fact. You see, I'm around Jackie a lot more than his mother is.

I was making Jackie's bed one morning when he came up behind me, and grabbed me round the waist, and asked, real serious, "Aunt Dorothy, are the stars *really* other suns like this one, and do they have planets too?"

I said, "Why, sure, Jackie. I thought you knew that."

He gave me a hug. "Thanks, Aunt Dorothy. I thought Mig was kidding me."

"Who's Mig?" I asked. I knew most of the kids on the block, you see, but there was a new little girl on the corner. I asked, "Is she the little Jackson girl?"

Jackie said, "Mig isn't a *girl!*" And did he sound disgusted! "Besides," he said, "Mig doesn't live 'round here at all. His name is really Migardolon Domier, but I call him Mig. He doesn't really talk to me. I mean, just inside my head."

I said, "Oh." I laughed a little bit, too, because Jackie isn't really an imaginative kid. But I guess most kids go through the imaginary-playmate stage. I had one when I was a kid. I called her Bitsy—but anyway, Jackie just ran out to play, and I didn't think about it again until one day he asked me what a spaceship looked like.

So I took him to see that movie—you know the one Paul Douglas played in about the trip to Mars—but would you believe it, the kid just stuck up his nose.

"I mean a real spaceship!" he said. "Mig showed me a lot better one than *that*!"

So I spoke kind of sharp. You know, I didn't like him to be rude. And he said, "Well, Mig's father is building a spaceship. It goes all the way across the Gal—the gallazzy, I guess, and goes through—Aunt Dorothy, what's hyperspace?"

"Oh, ask Mig what it is," I said, real cross with him. You know how it is when kids act smart.

The next day was Saturday, so Beth was at home with Jackie, and I stayed with Mother. But when I came over Monday morning, she asked me, "Dorrie, where on earth did Jack pick up all this rocketship lingo? And what kind of a phase is this *Mig* business?"

I told her I'd taken him to see ROCKET MARS, and she was quite provoked. Beth still thinks rockets are kind of comic-book stuff, and she gave me a long talk about trashy movies, and getting him too excited, and overstimulating his imagination, and so forth.

Then she gave me the latest developments on this Mig affair. It seemed that Jackie had given with the details. Mig was a little fellow who lived on a planet halfway across the "gallazzy," and his father was a rocketship engineer.

Well, you know how kids are

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about spaceships. Jackie wasn't quite six, but he's always been kind of old for his age. That afternoon he started teasing me to take him to the Planetarium. He kept on about it until I finally took him, that evening, after Beth got home.

It was quite late when we left. The stars had all come out, and while we were walking home, I asked him which one of the stars Mig lived on. And, professor, do you know what that child said? He said, "You can't live on a *star*, dummy! You'd burn up! He lives on a *planet* around the star!"

He pointed off toward the north, fidgeted around for a few minutes, and finally said, "Well, the sky kind of looks different where Mig lives. But I think it's up there somewhere," and he pointed into the Big Dipper.

I didn't encourage the Mig business, but, good gosh, it didn't need encouraging. I guess it was two or three days later when Jackie told me that Mig's sun was going to blow up, so his father was building a spaceship, and they were coming here to live.

I kept a straight face. But I couldn't help wondering what would happen when Jackie got his Mig, so to speak, down to earth. Probably it would just ease the fantasy off into a more normal phase, and it would gradually disappear.

One night in August, Beth wanted to go to a movie with some girls from her office, so I stayed with Jackie. I was reading downstairs when I suddenly heard him bawling upstairs—not very loud, but real unhappy and pitiful.

I ran upstairs and took him up, thinking he'd had a bad dream, and held him, just shaking and trembling, until he finally quieted down to a hiccup now and then.

And then he said, in the unhappiest little voice, "Mig has to leave his—his *erling* on the planet, to get blowed up with the sun! It's a little bitty thing like a puppy, but his Daddy says there isn't any room on the spaceship for it! But he got it for his—well, I guess it was kind of like a birthday—and he wanted to show it to me when he got here!"

Well!

I guess the lecture I gave him about imagination had something to do with it, because I didn't hear any more about Mig for quite some time. He kept Beth posted, though. He even told her when the spaceship was going to take off and when Mig's sun was going to blow up, or else where we'd see it. I don't know which. But anyway, he made her mark it down on the Calendar. The fifth of November, it was.

Well, in September I went back to college, and—well, I don't just talk about things outside of the family, but my boy friend, Dave, he was almost like one of the family, and this year

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he'd got a job working with Professor Milliken at the Observatory.

You know Professor Milliken, don't you? I thought so. I told Dave about this Mig phase of Jackie's, and one night when Dave was over at Beth's with me, he got the kid talking about it. He humored the kid a lot. He even took him over to the Observatory and let Jackie look through the big telescope there. And of course Jackie gave Dave all the latest details on Mig.

It seems that this spaceship had already taken off—that was why he hadn't heard much from Mig lately, because—"Mig's Daddy sealed him up in a little capsule, so he won't wake up till they are 'way out in hyperspace. Because the spaceship will go faster and faster and *awful* fast, and unless he is sealed up, and asleep, it will hurt him something *awful!*" And Dave humored Jackie, and talked about acceleration and hyperspace and shortcuts across the Galaxy, and I don't know what all, and Jackie just sat there and drank it all in as if he understood every word. Dave even wrote down the day when Mig's sun was supposed to blow up, and promised to keep an eye on it.

Jackie started to kindergarten, of course, about then, and I thought he'd forgotten all about Mig. I didn't hear anything more for at least six weeks. But one night—I was babysitting for Beth again—the telephone rang, and it was Dave.

"Dorothy! Remember Jackie's little Galactic citizen whose world was supposed to go up in smoke tonight?"

I glanced at the calendar. It was November fifth. "Now, look here, Dave," I said firmly. "You are not going to disillusion the kid like that. He's forgotten all about the silly business. Besides, he's in bed."

"Well, get him up!" said Dave. "Dorrie, get a load of this. The biggest supernova I ever saw just exploded in the North. Get Jackie over here! I want to ask him some questions!"

He meant it. I could tell that he meant it. I ran upstairs and bundled Jackie up in a blanket —I didn't even bother to put his clothes on, just a blanket over his pajamas—and took him down to the Observatory in a taxi.

I wish you could have seen the place. Jackie sitting on a table, in his pajamas, telling Professor Milliken all about Mig and the spaceship and the little sealed capsule and the *erling* and all the rest of it.

I guess you can imagine what a week we went through. Scientists, and reporters, and psychologists and parapsychologists and just plain debunkers. And the crackpots. Oh yes, the crackpots. And then they dug up the records about Jackie's father.

They couldn't even let the poor

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man rest quiet in his grave, and when they found out about the Bombing, they talked about hard radiations and mutations until I darn' near went crazy, and Beth had to quit her job.

They even talked about telepathy, just as if Jackie was some kind of a freak. We had to take the poor kid out of kindergarten. He hated that—he was getting so much good out of it. And he enjoyed it so much, having the other children to play with, and painting, and making those cute little baskets, and he'd learned to tell time, and everything.

And then the spaceship landed, and I tell you, we haven't had a minute's peace since.

Oh, *that's* all right! I was going to call them in for lunch in a few minutes, anyway. "Jackie! *Jackie*—will you and Mig come in here for a few minutes? A friend of your uncle Dave's wants to talk to you two boys."

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dirge for the sane

by . . . John Jakes

He thought himself a strong and sane commander—a model for his crew! But grim accidents happen!

I CAN'T believe it.

I don't scare easily, but *I simply can not believe it.*

Spence can't believe it either. He's howling with loon-laughter.

On the records we are listed as Spatian Mapping Team Forty-three. Just the five of us, Spence, Norcross, Garjo, Black and myself. We received beneficial preventive psycho-therapy at the base at Flag City, Alpha Centauri Four. Two weeks of healthful artificial sunshine, relaxing dips in the warm limpid water of the indoor pool, and entertainment at night by fresh-cheeked, long-limbed blondes who came all the way from Earth because the pay was good, the return speedy.

At dinner each night we received pep talks from our C.O., the chaplain and a psychiatrist. Chatty informal little talks they were, with platitudes and popular psychoanalysis wrapped up into one hail-fellow-well-met pill. All over the base the same procedure was going on. It was the routine technique, preparing us for the ordeal in space.

Finally the big day came. They gave us the nod, and checked us out. The jets blasted, and we

When a general fiction writer invades the science fiction field a newness of approach can usually be anticipated. We're sure you'll agree that John Jakes has a flair for stark realism, with no punches drawn.

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roared across the long, completely incomprehensible blackness to chart a belt of class two planetoids at the edge of the system. Other men in the corps were doing the same thing, in the Centauri system and beyond.

After all, we knew the odds. Three years' service and enough money to retire on. It was tough, dangerous work, the danger splitting up between the landing on new worlds, and the actual contact with the unthinkably wide black gulf of dark pressing flat and close against the steel-glass view plates.

The ships often came back with one or two "Loonies," as we had cynically learned to call them. Often, too, they never came back at all, and no one ever found out why. But that didn't change things. Man's mental capacities somehow had not developed fully enough, even in the most well-adjusted individual, to cope with space—space dark, star-burning, and longer than all of time itself.

The price of insanity, especially when the job was entirely on a volunteer basis, was a small sum to pay for adding to our frame of reference. It was a piddling penalty for charting a hunk of space-floating rock on our maps, and being able to point a finger to its symbol and say: *Here. We know what this is now. We have seen it.*

Norcross went insane at the end of the third week. We had charted sixteen planetoids. We had eighty-seven more to go. We locked Norcross in the padded room in the stern where automatic units somewhat like the old Automat windows would provide him with food and drink three times a day, if he remained coherent enough to eat at all.

We charted twelve more planetoids and talked of the Loony in the stern. Callous and cynical? You bet. There was no other way. Man pays a price for his first look at new frontiers. Ages before, the price had been a scalp lost or a belly skewered with an arrow, so the school books told us. In space the price was mind-shock.

Black went insane next. We locked him in the padded room with Norcross while Spence, Garjo and I continued to chart the planetoids.

With twenty-six more to do, we were in space when Spence came into the control room, mopping his forehead with a handkerchief although the temperature of the ship was constant, neither hot nor chilly. Spence licked his lips as I turned around to look at him. The automatic pilot tapes took care of themselves. Beyond the view plates, diamonds streamed like comets in the great dark as we plunged forward in a thunder of jets.

Spence clamped the bulkhead shut, and leaned against it.

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"What's wrong with you?" I demanded in alarm. "What is it, man?"

His dark eyes dilated in stark fright. "James . . . James . . . it's Garjo."

"What's the matter with Garjo?"

Spence gulped the circulated air, and managed to control the trembling in his shoulders. I suddenly felt that a small army of beetles had made a highway out of my spine.

"Well?" I prodded. "What's the trouble with Garjo? Speak up, can't you?"

"Garjo's back at the port view plate!" Spence glanced from wall to wall, then came forward. His voice lowered to a whisper. "His eyes are burning holes in his face." Spence demonstrated, forming a moon shape with two thumbs and two index fingers. "He's gurgling like a baby. Just sitting there, blinking at the stars like they were electric lights."

I frowned, the beetle army doubling in size. "It's bad, eh? Really bad?"

"Yes, yes, bad." Spence's breathing was still ragged. "I tried to shake him, but he didn't pay any attention. Then when I started up here, he turned and began cursing me." Spence elaborated. The combinations of anatomical practices Garjo had recommended to Spence might have been hilariously funny in other surroundings. I didn't laugh.

"You see what I mean?" Spence breathed. He clutched my shoulder. "Do you?"

I nodded. "Sure I see. It will be hard on him, but we've got to lock him up."

"He won't know he's locked up. He just watches the stars, like a little baby. He's Loony, James. That makes three."

I checked the pilot tapes to make sure we were not slipping down the blackness too fast. It isn't pleasant to end pulped on a chunk of planetoidal rock. I got out my gun. I looked at Spence. Spence shook with a tremble, readying himself for the ordeal. I did not think him a coward.

"Let's go," I said to him.

He unclamped the bulkhead, and we walked out into the passage. At the cross-way we took the port corridor. I stayed in front with the weapon, a tri-power gun, held out of sight behind my right hip. Our boots clanked on the metal flooring.

I could see Garjo sitting by the view plate, exactly as Spence had described him. He did not hear us coming, although we made enough noise at it. Garjo's chin shone moistly, and he blinked his eyes like camera shutters with sickening regularity.

I should have caught the warning shift in the corner of his black right eye. But I slipped up badly. I touched his shoulder,

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jostled him, and his neck swayed in rubbery fashion. When I reacted, he had already moved an instant before me.

"Garjo!" Spence screamed in soft agony.

We were looking at the business end of the tri-power, and Garjo backed against the wall in a menacing slouch, one shoulder lower than the other. The barrel of the weapon he had snatched from my hand had a bluish-gray straightness as chillingly unbending as his new and dangerous mental attitude.

"I knew you'd be coming to lock me up sooner or later," he said. His eyes got wide, then narrow, then wide again. His laugh was only a cough, made doubly horrible by a snakish twitch of heavy lips. "Think you'll lock me up with the others, do you? I tell you—*no.*"

"Be reasonable, Garjo," I said quietly. "Come now—give me that gun."

"Shut up!" For three minutes he repeated his descriptions of tortured anatomy. Spence was breathing like a bellows. At last Garjo said, "Go on past me. Ahead of me. Walk down the hall."

I leaped for Garjo. Instantly he rammed the tri-power muzzle up into the roof of my mouth, tearing skin, cracking a tooth, and making my tongue taste bloody. Spence was too paralyzed to fight. Side by side we walked ahead of Garjo. For the first time it became quite clear where he was taking us.

I looked at Spence, but his face was now expressionless, and slack. I twisted the idea back into my own mind, writhing with it, but recognizing its truth. Garjo's insanity was one-hundred-percent genuine. But it was peculiarly oblique—a deadly, tormented hate urge grounded in unreason.

Garjo unclamped the door of the padded compartment. Inside, Norcross and Black stirred, looked up, and came up from the floor in spiderish scrabbling crawls. They scowled at Garjo, standing close together.

"Come on out," Garjo told them.

I pushed my elbow viciously into Spence's ribs and yelled at him: *"For God's sake get them quickly."*

I suppose he was too dazed to act. I made another try for Garjo, but Norcross and Black received sudden unholy illumination. Garjo's words penetrated their sick brains with some last semblance of rational meaning, and they yipped like dogs.

One of them kicked me in the groin. I couldn't see Spence any more. I kicked, clawed, missed my footing and went down on my hands and knees.

Norcross howled, laughing, and wiped his boot-heel on my face three times.

I lay there, Spence beside me,

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a soft padded surface beneath my belly. I seemed to remember the compartment door clamping shut. My head ached. Spence and I got slowly to our feet. I looked around. A wall compartment opened and out came a shrimp cocktail, then roast beef, then ice cream, then a mug of black coffee.

Spence cried out and beat on the closed bulkhead while I stood retching in one corner.

I said to Spence: "Don't you think it's funny?"

"What?" His voice came out of the mausoleum of his mind.

"Two went Loony. We locked them up. Non-normative behavior. Then one more. Three of the five. Garjo was smart like a fox. From some place he got the idea. Three to two. The behavior of Norcross and Black and Garjo has majority backing now!"

Then I was pummeling his stupid shoulders and shouting words at his dull paralyzed face. "Don't you see? *We're* the minority now. *We're* the Loonies."

But he didn't understand, not then. It took him an hour to comprehend. I spent some time trying to eat, managed to down half of a poppy seed roll and a slice of the gravy-dipped beef, now cold. But it wouldn't stay down for long.

Suddenly Spence shuddered and crawled back and forth across the compartment on his knees. He tried to rip out handfuls of the padding, tried until his nails cracked and bled. I knew he had it, then.

I can't believe it.

I simply can not believe it.

Spence can't believe it either. He's howling with loon-laughter.

I can explain it rationally and understand it. But somehow it is all out of focus. And just three minutes ago, Garjo screeched a message through the talk tube. I could almost see his coal-chunk eyes lighting up with malicious glee as he called to us.

There is no window here in this padded place, so I'll never meet him again face to face. But he told me where we are going. He and Norcross and Black, reinstated members of the normal-behaving majority, are re-threading the pilot tapes.

Now I know why some of the corps ships never get back.

The three of them are diving the ship into the blue-gas furnace of Alpha Centauri.

I must be insane.

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THE STORY BEHIND THE COVER . . .

Scientific progress has a strange way of generating a high degree of bafflement in graph-minded philosophers who specialize in prophecies and predictions. It does not follow any clearly defined mathematical pattern, and it would have bewildered Euclid quite as much as it must of necessity confuse mathematical physicists who think in cosmic terms.

Its upward course cannot be charted in straight lines, or even in curves or angles. It resembles more a bright, many-hued tapestry that seems often to waver in a breeze from beyond Space and Time, with some of its folds sharply delineated, and others shrouded in darkness. But in every age there are a few shining guideposts lining the pathway to the next great advance, the miracle in the bud which will eventually blossom with a splendor undreamed of to change every aspect of human life on Earth.

In this month's boldly imaginative cover illustration three such guideposts point the way to a miracle that has already begun to transform the world we live in to bring it into the fullest possible accord with man's capacity to dream.

The first is a beating human heart superimposed on an intricate cardiographic recording apparatus—an apparatus as fascinating in its complexity as a host of multi-cellular organisms on the slide of a powerful electron-miscroscope. The second is a slender rocket ship daring the gulfs between the planets. The third is a symbol of atomic energy—a symbol just a little in advance of the one which was used by the industrious physicists at Oak Ridge.

Separately and individually these three guideposts spell out: (1) Man's ever deepening understanding of his own body and mind, and the progress which is now being made in every department of medicine and the natural sciences to extend our human life span, and triumph over the crippling inroads of disease. (2) Man's coming conquest of space and colonization of the planets, a conquest which waits only on his ability to utilize in a world at peace every technical resource now availabe to him. (3) The release of all the energies which smoulder at the very core of matter itself, energies which, if we are to accept the hypothesis of Hoyle and his brilliant astronomical co-workers, created the universe itself from an eternally drifting, eternally self-perpetuating mass of hydrogen gas.

FRANK BELKNAP LONG.

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he who served

by . . . Ray Cummings

This surely was the blackest of crimes—to be newly built, and lead the blind, and be a friend beyond all human understanding.

TWO RY could remember the quick bright warmth of the afternoon sun on his burnished copper and silvery plating. He could remember every prideful moment of his early training in the big yard of the James Erg factory. Every afternoon, at first only in good weather, he and others of the newly-built had been taken into the yard from the quiet dimness of the storeroom indoors. Not only was he the largest, the finest robot of them all, but he was the most intricately constructed and the most adept at complicated tasks. And he had been the first of the newer models to be trained.

There were only twenty-five others of Model 2 RY under construction—the supreme achievement of the genius of James Erg, the culmination of a lifetime of work. For a quarter of a century no other robot-builder had been able to compete with the world famous Erg product.

The big Erg factory in the suburbs of New York dominated the world market, its products

Ray Cummings has delighted two generations of science fantasy readers with his unforgettable tales of the infinitely small and the infinitely large. We are all atom conscious today, but Ray was the first to discern the realms of gold spinning in miraculous splendor far below the threshold of the visible. He has explored newer realms here, in a story so human and heart-warming you won't be ashamed to shed a tear on completing it.

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ranging from modest one-task models up to the most elaborate. Model 2 RY was now the most elaborate, costing two hundred and fifty thousand dollars. It was guaranteed slow-trained over a full two year period. The training included, of course, additional instruction for any specialized tasks desired by its purchaser; and association with the members of his family so that the timbre of their human voices would produce no untowered reactions.

2 RY was big, just under seven feet. His frozen countenance, with its square-cut contours, and faceted eyes, and his sturdy body-box gave him the aspect of a rough-hewn statue, but was in no way grotesque. His voice, hollow yet with several emotional gradations to it, was soft and pleasing. He could remember that the human voice of the Instructor was very much like his own—gentle and quiet, and beguiling in its infinite patience.

2 RY had been taught just simple things at first. "Toory, come here." He had learned to balance upright the first day. "Come, Toory. Stand here by me." With his great jointed legs swinging, and sometimes clanking because of his untrained awkwardness, Toory would obey.

"Very good, Toory. Now—sit down. Flat—all the way down. That's it, Toory."

How patient the man had remained! "Now—raise your right hand. No, not that one. The *right* hand, Toory. That's splendid!"

And when he failed to realize he had made a mistake, the question would come again. "You're using your left hand. Do you understand, Toory?"

"Yes," Toory would say.

He could remember every glorious moment of those two years. Outdoors in rainy weather, with the rain dimming his eye-lenses so that he had to learn to polish them with a bit of fabric. And more often in cold weather when all his motions seemed to require more effort. His reactions then would be slower if he did not automatically quicken them. Quite as varied were the many tasks indoors in the training rooms. They were mostly domestic tasks, because Toory had been designed essentially, not for factory or business work, but for the home.

At last he realized that his training was over, and one day soon after that, his prospective purchaser came. His name was Robert Doret. He was a wealthy man and an important one. The faint, red-glowing beams from Toory's eyes, deep-set under his ridged brows, gazed down in apprehension at the man who perhaps might buy him.

"So you're trained to be called 'Toory'?" Robert Doret asked. "Is that correct?"

"Yes," Toory replied, striving to remain calm.

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"You're right," Doret said to James Erg, who stood beside him. "Quite a pleasant, well-modulated voice. Certainly far more human-sounding than the other models."

"Try him on emotion," Erg suggested.

Doret thought a moment. "I'm not sure I'm entirely pleased with you, Toory," he said.

"I do not understand why," Toory murmured, contritely. "But I am sorry."

"You will find several emotion-gradations like that," Erg said.

"I see. Yes, it's a very impressive model, Erg—far in advance of your others." Doret smiled thoughtfully. He was a small man, bulging about the middle, with a rosy, pleasant face. "I guess he's worth the price, Erg."

The skin around the blue eyes crinkled with tiny traceries of white lines and Toory suddenly felt glad that Robert Doret might purchase him. It was like the glow he experienced when he understood a task, and accomplished it perfectly.

The next day Toory learned that the sale had been made. He was to serve in Doret's country home, up in the hills north of the city. Toory needed no specialized training for that. But he learned that there was to be intensive, new-task instruction for a month to prepare him for his duties as a domestic helper for Babs Doret, the purchaser's daughter, for whom he had been bought.

She came with her father the next day—a small, brown-haired girl in a trim blue suit. Toory learned afterward that she was eighteen years old.

"This is Miss Babs, Toory," Erg explained. "You'll have to learn her voice well, and be quick to obey. Speak to her now."

"Yes, Miss Babs," Toory said.

"Talk to him, Babs," Doret urged.

"Hello, Toory," Babs said. "Give me your hand. I want to grasp it."

Toory's mailed hand was sheathed in a soft black glove. He was careful to keep his work-pincer retracted as he had been taught. He held out his hand, keeping it well lowered because the girl was quite small, two feet shorter than himself. Her own hand fumbled around for an instant. Fumbled because—Babs Doret was blind.

"It will be comforting," she said, when her fingers at last closed over the glove. "Father, you've made me very happy."

"The new training should not take more than a month," Erg said. "You must work with him an hour or two each day. You'd better practice walking with him in the city traffic, if you plan to go into the city."

"Not much," Babs said. "Certainly for this summer, anyway, I'll be staying close to home."

"One of my Operatives will report tomorrow," Erg told her.

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"I'll deliver Toory to you this afternoon . . . You will learn the new tasks, Toory?"

"Yes," Toory promised.

Then in the big Erg truck he was taken up into the hills to the Doret summer home where he remained under wait-command in the foyer until the Instructor arrived the next day. How warmly he remembered him from the training periods in the factory. Immediately the new-task training began. It was simple, letting Babs Doret hold his dangling gloved hand, leading her where she directed him to go.

For only a short while was the Erg man really needed. The three of them took long walks together so that Toory would become familiar with the neighborhood.

With the Instructor intently watching, Toory soon learned to lead the girl safely through the traffic of the village streets. Quickly he developed a sixth-sense alertness to the dangers to Babs that must be seen, and avoided. That was the important thing—avoiding danger to this blind girl whose hand he held, avoiding it so that instantly with permanent order for automatic action instilled in him, his response would come with split-second timing.

The voice of the Instructor remained everlastingly patient when for the hundredth time he repeated the permanent order so that it would be impressed on Toory beyond the possibility of error.

"Danger to Miss Babs must be avoided, Toory. *Danger to Miss Babs. Any danger.* Do you understand, Toory?"

"Yes," Toory replied.

He learned all the traffic signals quickly. He was pleased with a warmth inside him that kept getting brighter. "He's all right," the Erg man said at last. "We've certainly given him plenty of tests, Miss Doret. His reactions are all that could be desired."

"Yes," Babs agreed. "You've no idea how comforting it is, how safe I feel."

It was nice that she was pleased. She asked, "You're not mixed up about anything, Toory?"

"No," Toory replied.

Then the Erg man went away, and Toory's independent service began. It caused him no confusion. There were the daily walks with Miss Babs, sometimes shopping trips to the village, and visits to the homes of her friends. Everywhere Toory was admired, so large, and shining a model he seemed, so comprehensive and smooth of response. Toory glowed inwardly. His brain-tapes received the warmth, and his memory etched it down.

There was really little for Toory to do but assist and watch over Babs. The Doret home was a many-roomed, spacious house set in a grove of trees on a heavily wooded hillside a mile from the village. There were several human servants, and on the day of

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his arrival they had come in a little group to gaze at him curiously.

Babs told him their names and their general duties. There was Annie, the maid, and Higgins and his wife who served as steward and cook. There were also Tom, the chauffeur, Nerina, who was Miss Babs' personal maid, and old Jacques, the gardener.

Mrs. Higgins, that first day, had seemed alarmed. Her whisper to her husband had been very faint, but Toory's electronic hearing-grids had picked it up clearly. "Sure gives you the creeps, that thing lookin' at you with them red eye-beams."

All the other human servants had warmed to Toory, but Mrs. Higgins had remained hostile. "It's because we ain't never worked in a house with one of those *machines,* Miss Babs," her husband had murmured, apologetically. "Not even a little one."

"She'll get used to it," Miss Babs assured him. "None of you will ever have to give him an order. He'll stand here in the foyer under wait-command when I don't need him."

There was little confusion in Toory's new life. During the nights the foyer and the rooms adjoining it were dim and silent, so that Toory's eye-beams remained motionless while he waited. But by day his gaze roamed a bit, because there was more sound and movement.

Annie the parlour maid would be cleaning and dusting, or the thin, sharp-faced Gil Higgins would be moving about, swiftly, deftly at his duties. And there also was Nerina—she who was Miss Babs' personal maid—who quite often darted to and fro. Of them all, only Nerina ever spoke to him. She would say "Morning, Toory." And Miss Babs had taught him to respond with a cheery "Hello!"

It was all very comfortable to Toory as his memory-tapes etched down the many little incidents of the passing days. There was never any bewilderment. He made no mistakes, and he rejoiced in the warmth of his memories. All the things going on around him here in a house that had been new at first, but that now seemed completely homelike. Mostly Toory liked going out with Babs, which they did nearly every afternoon when the weather was right.

Generally they stayed out quite a long time. But there was one afternoon when they started, and came quickly back. Feeling unusually tired, Miss Babs went at once upstairs to her room and Toory resumed his silent, motionless wait-command in the foyer recess.

For a while there was nothing for his eye-beams to follow. Then he heard the soft tread of Higgins moving about in the library. In the quiet, somber dimness, Toory's eye-beams shifted. Through the

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foyer archway he could see Higgins clearly.

The steward was sliding back a wall panel, disclosing a big square metal box which was built solidly into the space behind it. As Toory watched Higgins turned a knob on the box. It opened, and Higgins took something out and dropped it into his right coat pocket—something which for an instant as Higgins held it, sparkled in the faint light.

Toory had seen the sparkling object before. He had seen it on Miss Bab's neck, and he recognized it instantly.

It was a new incident. Never before had he seen anyone open the big metal box except Babs and her father. Higgins closed the box at once, wiping it off carefully with his handkerchief. It was like watching Annie dusting furniture. Then he slid the panel closed, wiped that off also, and came quickly out into the foyer. His tread was almost silent on the heavy rugs as he went back toward the pantry.

In the foyer suddenly he noticed Toory. It seemed to frighten him. "Gawd! It saw me!" he muttered to himself. "The blarsted machine—"

All the rest of that afternoon Toory could feel confusion faintly stirring in him, because what Higgins had done had been something *new*. He was vaguely relieved when Nerina passed him, going upstairs with Miss Babs' supper. "Hello, Toory," she said as she went past.

"Hello," he responded.

There were no visitors that evening. Mr. Doret had gone away for about a week, and in his absence the house was much quieter. Still under wait-command, Toory stood in the hall with almost nothing to see, and little to hear.

At midnight he automatically shifted to be on guard-command. It had been part of his training, and after a little while he had never failed to respond properly to the surprise tests the Instructor had devised for him.

Now Toory's sight-beams were intensified, compensating the dimmer light; and the audio-circuits were at the highest magnification. He could hear many faint and distant tiny sounds, sounds which no human ear could distinguish. Already he was familiar with the accustomed sounds of the night. There was always the faint whir of the many electronic appliances in the house, blending with the ponderous ticking of the big hall clock. And often the stir of the breeze under the eaves. Especially on windy nights.

Distant murmurs of voices inside the house always came distinctly to Toory when he was on guard-command. A few floated to him now.

"Yeah, his name's Peter and he's a nice boy, too. Got plenty of money. Soon as I met him he started spending it on me." Toory

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knew that was Annie the parlour maid, who roomed high upstairs with Nerina.

Presently there were other, very faint murmurs, faint because they came from the top of the most distant wing of the big house.

"Sure I hid it. You don't think I'd be such a fool, keeping it here in the house? It's hid down in the woods, in that place I showed you. Thirty thousand pounds sterling we'll get for the diamond-string. It's worth easy that."

"Gil, is it really?"

"If it's worth a farthing."

The murmurs came from Higgins and his wife. The barking of the dog down the hill swelled louder, so that Toory listened to the animal as it bayed at the moon. It often did that, mostly all night. Then there was Higgins' murmur again.

"I say, don't lose your nerve, old girl. It'll be a mess. We'll be suspected, of course, but so will all the staff, which makes it quite all right. See what I mean? Miss Babs being blind, anybody could have sneaked up on her to watch her open that strongbox. It's a simple lock, like I said. Anybody could have done it."

"Or even a visitor, Gil."

"Of course. Lots of people knew she had that necklace. There'll be a lot of stink when Miss Babs finds out it's been stolen. But they'll never pin it on us. I'm not a fool, wiped everything off. Not a chance I left any fingerprints."

"But Gil, the police! they'll—"

"Sure. They'll question us all. So what? We'll just sit tight, and leave the necklace down there in the woods while we wait a good two years. Then all we do is say we'll have a go at service in England again. I'll sell the diamonds over there one by one. Who'll ever be the wiser?"

It was nice to hear the drone of the voices for a while, and then Toory's attention drifted away. The weathercock on the roof gable began squeaking again. It was always loud on windy nights. It blended with the human-voice murmurs.

"I didn't know the blarsted thing was in the house, I tell you. I thought it had taken Miss Babs out for a walk."

"Gil, it saw you take the necklace!"

"It did. But I tell you I didn't know it had come back with Miss Babs. I never thought about it at all."

"You could have waited until some other day. You could have—"

"Stop jawin' at me, Mary. It's done now."

"But it will tell what it saw."

"Don't be a fool! That blarsted machine's not smart enough to talk—not unless somebody questions it."

"But they *will* question it. Miss

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Babs will ask it if it saw anyone at the safe."

"Not until she finds out the necklace is gone, and she won't find out until she goes to that party Friday night. Gives me three days to shut up that damn machine. You'll see."

"Gil, I'm scared. It could even be listening to us now! It's down there in the foyer, and I heard Miss Babs say once that when it's on guard-command it can hear better than any dog."

The voices softened a little. Toory's eyebeams swung idly around the foyer as he listened to the human voices, and the baying dog down the hill and the creaking weathercock. It was very simple being on guard-command. There was no danger here. Miss Babs was safe. He could remember how the Instructor had given him the permanent order to guard Miss Babs. The human voices went on droning.

"So it's listenin' to us now? So what? A machine can't say, or do anything on its own. You have to give it an order. And I tell you I got everything figured out. Nobody's going to question a machine to find out what's on its memory tapes. I'm not that much of a fool."

"Gil! What you going to do?"

"Smash it, that's what. I'm going to take it out tomorrow night and smash it to smithereens."

"Gil! You're crazy. You wouldn't dare go near it. It's got the strength of fifty men—"

"That's how much you know. I'll take it outdoors, in the night. You know that little catwalk swing-bridge over the gorge? It's only about a mile from here. Well, it's been condemned. A sign on it says you don't dare cross it now, it ain't safe, and might collapse."

"I know. I saw the sign. But Gil—"

"So I take that blarsted machine out there and I order it to walk across the bridge. A machine that weighs a couple of tons will crash, won't it? Two hundred feet down to the rocks! Smash, Mary—the memory-tape of what it saw and heard gone forever. See what I mean? Simple, eh?"

"But Gil, how can you take it out for a walk? It won't take orders from you. It won't, will it?"

"No, maybe it wouldn't, right now. But I'll fix that tomorrow afternoon. And tomorrow night I'll take it out. What difference what anybody suspects if they can't prove anything? A piece of damn machinery goes wrong, wanders out in the middle of the night and gets itself smashed, ruined. Who can prove different?"

"But Gil—suppose it turned on you? Suppose, while you're orderin' it out—"

"Don't you see I have no choice? If that thing blabbed it saw me take the diamond-string

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I'd be done for. A machine can't lie, Mary. It's got a memory-record nobody could get away from. Go to sleep now. Let me do the worrying."

The human voices went silent.

The big foyer clock was sonorously chiming. Toory could remember that Erg's reception room at the factory had a chiming clock too. Now as the hours passed, and the new day began, Toory stood in his hall niche with his eyebeams fixed on their usual resting place across the foyer. Soon it would be time to shift automatically from guard-command to wait-command. It was nice to know that he never made any mistakes. Most of all, that was what he prided himself on.

The next afternoon Miss Babs took him for a walk again. It was a day of dancing summer sunlight, and very happily he led her down the little path through the garden, and out the side gate where the road passed that led to the village.

"Take the path to the stream, Toory. Then we can come back the other way—around the hill."

"Yes, Miss Babs," Toory said.

They had walked here many times, and it was easy not to do it wrong. Toory followed the road until they reached the rocky hill that lay beyond it. The stream roared as it tumbled through the ravine where the swaying catwalk swing-bridge dangled from a dizzy height across the cliff-tops. Here in the open it was placidly babbling over moss-covered stones.

He remembered how Miss Babs had told him that the little brook was always happy here, because it laughed all the time. At the stream edge she sat down in the sunlight, and motionless under wait-command Toory stood pridefully at her side.

A big flyer was faintly roaring as it passed high overhead. The red eyebeams of Toory's gaze streamed up to it, but he didn't have to be alert, because it wasn't dangerous to Miss Babs. Presently he heard footsteps approaching and recognized the tread of Higgins. He had been aware of the sound very faintly behind him almost all the way from the house.

Then Higgins came in sight. He walked straight past Toory toward Miss Babs. "Nice afternoon, Miss Babs," he said.

"Oh—is that you, Higgins," the blind girl asked.

"That it is, Ma'am. My day off, you know. A chap can do with a bit of walking outdoors now and then."

"Yes, it's a beautiful day, Higgins," Miss Babs agreed.

The steward's slim, wiry body was clad in a white-striped blue suit, and he wore a high stiff collar, and a red necktie. He had no hat, so that the summer breeze was ruffling his thin, sandy hair. He lingered, standing beside Babs with a cigarette dangling from his lips.

Toory waited motionless near-

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by, and presently he knew from the unheeded blur of their words that they were talking of Model 2 RY.

"And I never once spoke to it, Miss Babs. Not all this time."

The girl smiled. "Did you want to, Higgins?"

"Well, I don't know. Gives you a sort of rummy feeling, a thing like that standin' around all the time. Shall I try speakin' to it now, Miss Babs?"

She laughed. "Of course, if you wish. Go ahead, and say, 'Hello' to him."

"Hello, Toory," Higgins said.

"Hello," Toory responded. It was just like Nerina's greeting, and easy to answer properly.

"Science is sure wonderful," Higgins said. "He remembers everything he ever knew, don't he? That's what Mr. Doret was saying—the thing's got a memory-tape that puts everything down, just like he was writin' it in a book. Does he learn new things easy, Miss Babs?"

"Yes, he's quite quick to learn," Miss Babs assured him.

"What I mean, if you tell him something new—not just something he's been taught—what would he do? Could I try him out, Miss Babs?"

"Why—why yes, I suppose so," Miss Babs frowned. "Try, if you want to, Higgins. But you'd better make it something simple."

Higgins swung around. "Wade across the stream, Toory," he said.

Toory's eyebeams lifted. It was an order taking him off wait-command. He started to move, then stopped. Something seemed to be wrong, and he was trying very hard not to make a mistake. It was like those puzzling moments in his training when he couldn't decide what he should do.

"It would be bad for you to get your legs wet, wouldn't it?" Higgins asked.

"No," Toory responded. His eyebeams swung to Babs.

"Do it, Toory," Babs said.

The wide rocky stream was shallow directly below the gorge, so that it hardly wet Toory's knees as he waded across.

"Now, come back!" Higgins called.

Toory came back. Again under automatic wait-command, he stood motionless. He knew that he had done the task properly. It was strange that the unpleasant feeling inside him should persist. It was just as though he had done something wrong.

"Certainly is real wonderful, Miss Babs," Higgins was exclaiming. "Real wonderful!"

He gave Toory a few more orders while Babs listened, and Toory responded dutifully. But it all seemed wrong. Toory was glad when Higgins lighted another cigarette and wandered on; and then presently Toory was leading the girl home around the base of

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the rocky hill in the familiar way he knew so well.

It was Toory's last task for the day, and nightfall found him quiescent again in the hall niche. A storm was in the making, so that there were more little noises than usual, especially after midnight when his hearing became sharpened. At monotonous intervals the big clock chimed, but soon after midnight the voice-murmurs in the house died away.

Then they started again and it made Toory's eyebeams shift and his head cock a little sidewise as he listened. The voices were familiar and he knew it was Higgins and his wife whispering together in the east wing.

"Oh Gil, be careful."

"Sure I will. I can handle that blarsted thing now. I gave it lots of orders this afternoon."

The murmurs blurred into the wind under the eaves. The night had been mostly cloudy, Toory knew, because no moonlight showed at the windows. But there was a little moonlight there now. Toory stood in his hall niche, watching it. Presently he could hear faint distant footsteps, a familiar tread, and he knew that Higgins was coming softly down through the house.

It was so new a thing that a queer, sharp jangling sprang up in Toory. He was on guard-command, ready to give an alarm-call if the need came. He remembered his guard-command training, the surprise tests in the night, the whispers of two strange men outside a window he'd been guarding.

It had been easy to give the alarm-call then. But surely this was different. It was so hard, trying to understand. Somehow it seemed that now there were things in his memory—things he had seen and heard—that ought to fit together like little widely scattered parts of a difficult order. You had to understand *all* the parts. He wanted very much to understand, because when he didn't, he made mistakes. It had seemed easy during his training. He wondered why Higgins was giving him parts so much harder to fit together than anything he had ever tried to understand before.

The faint sound of Higgins' tread was growing louder. Toory's gaze clung alertly to the staircase as he waited. Presently Higgins was at the top, and coming quietly, swiftly down the padded steps. He was wrapped in a great-coat with a dark hat on his head.

Toory stirred. One of his feet jerked with an impulse to move, but he remained motionless. Surely there was no need to shift to alarm-order, and give a warning cry. Higgins was a member of the household.

"Answer me soft, Toory," Higgins said, his voice low and tense. "You and I are goin' out together. You understand what I'm sayin'?"

"Yes," Toory answered softly.

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It was easy to understand. Miss Babs often would tell him that they were going out, and he would wait until she was ready. Toory stood motionless. In the faint red glow of his eyebeams the sweat-beads on Higgins' thin, sallow face glistened with tiny sparkling points of light.

"You've learned to take orders from me," Higgins said. "Remember? Even new orders."

"Yes, I remember," Toory said. He remembered that Babs had asked him to obey the orders. That seemed to make a difference.

Now Higgins was standing a little back toward the foyer wall, away from Toory. He said, "I'm takin' you out with me. We're leavin' by the front door. You go first."

Toory's eyebeams swayed, his great burnished body standing irresolute. He could feel his legs and arms trembling because the jangle of confusion was suddenly worse in him. It seemed terribly hard not to make a mistake.

Higgins' voice was insistent, even though it remained soft. "Get going, Toory. You'll obey orders, won't you?"

"Yes," Toory responded.

"Then open the front door."

Toory's great measured steps took him to the door. The latch fastenings clanked as he opened them, because his arms and hands were trembling. The heavy door swung wide, and bumped back against the stopper with a thump.

"I told you not to make a noise," Higgins murmured sharply.

Toory remembered. He always remembered the right response when he had done something wrong. "I am sorry," he said. "I did not mean to do anything wrong." He stood at the open doorway, trying to stop the quivering in his legs.

"You go first," Higgins whispered. "Take the garden path to the side gate. Start now."

With slow long strides Toory went out, and down the little steps. He could hear Higgins softly closing the door after them. Broken clouds floated overhead and the dim garden was faintly silvered with moonlight. The garden path was a little threading passage between the shrubs and flower-beds.

"Keep goin', Toory. You hear me?"

"Yes," Toory said. He could hear Higgins' breathing, close behind him. And back at the house, suddenly now there were faint sounds. As he turned back to stare he heard the click of the front door opening, and a familiar voice calling to him.

"Toory! Toory!" It was Babs! Very clear was the tapping of her cane as she felt her way out to the flagging outside the door.

Toory would have responded, even without direct-command. But instantly Higgins muttered, "Don't speak, Toory!"

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Toory did not speak. He remembered that always, a direct command had to be responded to first. Higgins jerked at his arm. "Come with me, over here. Stand quiet."

They stood a few feet off the path, by the edge of a shrub. "She's blind, she can't see us," Higgins whispered. "And she mustn't hear us either. Don't make *any* noise!"

Silently Toory stood with his eyebeams wildly swaying. If only Miss Babs would give him a direct-order. He wanted so desperately to obey it.

Now the summer moonlight aureoled the slender figure of Babs as she came slowly along the garden path, feeling her way with her cane. If only he could have led her as he always did.

"Toory, surely I heard you opening the front door," she called out suddenly. "Where are you, Toory? Answer me!"

Before Higgins could interfere Toory spoke loudly. "Here I am, Miss Babs!"

"Toory, you shouldn't have come out. Did someone order you?"

"Yes, Miss Babs."

"Who was it, Toory?"

Higgins whispered protests were vehement, but Toory hardly heard them.

"Higgins," Toory said.

"*Higgins* ordered you? Where is he now, Toory?"

"He is here beside me, Miss Babs."

Higgins cursed bitterly, and stepped out into the moonlight "I—I didn't tell him to come out, Miss Babs!" he said.

"Oh—so you're here, Higgins?" The blind girl's voice sounded startled. Toory could see them standing together on the garden path, the moonlight pallid on Higgins' frightened face.

"I came out to get the blarsted thing," Higgins said quickly. "I saw him out here, and thought I'd have a go at getting him back."

"You couldn't have made a mistake, Toory?" Babs said. "Answer me carefully now. Why did you come out?"

"He told me to obey him," Toory said. "He told me to go, and open the front door quietly."

"So you ordered him out," Babs said. "I can't understand this, Higgins. What possible reason—"

"I didn't!" Higgins protested. "He's got it all mixed up!"

"It has to be true," Babs told him. She was calmly angry. "We'll go back to the house now, Higgins. We'll soon see why you—"

"Oh no we won't!" In a panic Higgins had suddenly gripped her shoulders. "I don't know what he's talkin' about. It's all crazy talk! Crazy—"

"Higgins, take your hands off me. How dare you?"

"You think I'm lettin' a crazy

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machine say things about me? I'm tellin' you—"

"Take your hands off me, Higgins."

Now the struggling Babs was frightened. It sent a horrible jangle through Toory. There was something wrong, and Miss Babs was frightened about it. Suddenly he saw that she was trying to scream and Higgins in a panic had put his hand over her mouth.

Within Toory the jangling confusion grew worse, as if some horrible corroding acid burned at him. He had a permanent-order always to avoid danger to Miss Babs. Wasn't she in danger now? It was so terribly hard, trying to puzzle things out, without training-memory or an order. He could feel the jangle mounting to a bursting tumult. If only he could think for himself, act for himself, without any orders.

He heard himself saying, "I want to hold your hand, and lead you, Miss Babs."

The words so startled the two humans in front of him that they ceased to struggle. It was as though Model 2 RY suddenly had crossed a great abyss, and it was terrifying.

"Why—why Toory—" Babs cried.

"I want to hold your hand and lead you, Miss Babs. I am going to do it now." Toory's great metal legs clanked as he took a slow step forward.

"The thing's gone wild," Higgins choked. "It's comin' at us! Tell it to keep away from us! *You* tell it—"

"W-wait, Toory," Babs whispered.

"You hear?" Higgins almost screamed. "You hear that, you crazy—"

"No," Toory said. The disobedience was a shattering thing. It so frightened Toory, hearing his own voice say it, that his huge body stood twitching with a chaos impossible to control.

"I am going to lead you home, Miss Babs. It is better for us to go home now."

It was more than just independent thinking. Toory didn't know what it was; but in all the tumult within him there seemed to be the knowledge that this was the only right thing for him to do. Now he was clanking forward with determined steps.

Higgins jumped behind Babs and gasped wildly, "You keep away!"

"No," Toory said.

In the confused darkness of her blindness the girl was stammering something. Toory did not hear it. His swinging, heavy hand reached down and she recoiled from it, as if terrified by his inhuman strength. In his awkwardness he reached out again, and she gave a little cry, and wilted down at his feet.

He said, "Miss Babs, I am sorry. I did not mean to frighten you. I will carry you home now."

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It was as though a floodgate had broken, releasing in Toory an enormous surge of shining confidence. Higgins had backed further down the path, and Toory's eyebeams swung to his pallid, panic-stricken face.

"You keep away from me!" Higgins gasped.

"No," Toory said.

"You got to take orders from me! Do you hear?"

Toory moved from the fallen Babs, and started remorselessly toward Higgins. In wild panic Higgins stooped, picked up a stone and sent it clanking against the glistening plate of Toory's chest. Toory continued to advance, his hands extended with the work-pincers out.

For just an instant, like a terror-stricken animal with its foot in a trap, Higgins stood shaking. Then he turned and fled down the path. To no avail. With monstrous clanking bounds Toory was on him as he reached the garden gate.

It was all a strange and terrible confusion to Toory. Dominating him was the thought that he must carry Miss Babs back in safety, just as if she had been hit by an autocar and needed instant care.

Now he had caught Higgins up, and was pressing the frail human body against his massive chest. There may have been an instant when Higgins screamed and struggled. But if there was, it was soon over. The mangled thing became quiet.

Toory found himself on the highway that passed along at the foot of the hill. Beyond the steeply-rising, ragged cliff was dark against the sky, and a light was suddenly bathing Toory as he stood irresolute in the road with his burden—the headlights of an oncoming autocar. It ground to a stop, and men leaped out and stood gasping.

"It's Doret's new model. It has killed a man!"

Another car came along and the distress sirens of both cars started wailing. Then a police car arrived; and still Toory stood confused and trembling, grasping the thing that had been a man. It was terribly frightening, because so many new thoughts seemed to be needed to make sense of the confusion.

Now he could hear the men. "Don't try to give it orders, it might leap at us!"

And a voice from back at the garden. "Here's Babs Doret. It must have killed her too!"

No—no. That was wrong. Surely he had not hurt Miss Babs. He saw them up in the garden, bending over her. Somebody shouted, "She's fainted!"

He didn't want anyone to hurt Miss Babs. He would not permit anyone to hurt her, because he had a permanent-order to protect her.

The humans were all babbling.

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"If we could get the fuse out of it—"

"It's up in the center of the back, up at the shoulders, isn't it?"

"I wouldn't know, it's a new model."

Take the fuse out? Out of *him?* The fuse—

"Maybe we could hit the eye-lenses with bullets."

No—no. With smashed eye-lenses he would be blind, like Miss Babs. How could he guide her through the village traffic if his eye-lenses were broken?

"Don't get too close! It might jump at us!"

Now bullets were thudding against Toory. He thought for an instant one of them had hit an eye-lens. But it was only the metal plate of his forehead. The bullets sang after him as he flung Higgins' body down, and fled up into the darkness of the rocky cliff . . .

The dawn was approaching and still, somewhere up in the rocky darkness, Model 2 RY was crouching. Everyone knew that he could not have taken refuge elsewhere, for the cliff had been surrounded. James Erg had been summoned, and had arrived in an Erg truck. Doret, too, had been hastily sent for. And there was a swarm of police.

Erg stood with Doret, a little apart from the men in uniform. The grey-haired scientist was pale, frightened and awed. "This model of yours," Erg said, "is fortunately the only one of its kind I've sold, Doret. I'll refund your money, of course, and never make another 2 RY robot. I dare not do anything else."

Babs had talked with her father; and the hysterical, stricken Mary Higgins had confessed the theft of the diamond-string, and revealed where her husband had hidden it. Everyone knew all of the circumstances now.

"It encountered so many problems so far afield from its training," James Erg was saying. "It's understandable, in a way, but I never anticipated anything like this."

Something new had been added by a mysterious destiny to Model 2 RY, something that not all the genius of science could build into it.

"It beats me," one of the Erg Instructors said. "You can't build fear into a machine. But it's hiding up there now because *it's afraid!"*

Babs Doret's hair gleamed brightly in the dawnlight on the rocky hillside. "You try calling to him, Babs," Doret suggested. "You were closer to him than any of us."

She called quaveringly, "Toory —Toory, where are you? Can you hear me?"

He could hear her where he crouched, trembling. "Here I am, Miss Babs," he called back.

Her father prompted her. She

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called again. "We are going to take the fuse out, Toory."

No—no—that would be wrong. He did not want that. In fear and trembling he heard her voice again. "Stand up, Toory."

He wanted very much to do what was right. But this—

"Stand up, Toory."

He stood with the rose-glow of the coming sunlight glistening on him. Now he could see Miss Babs clearly, low down among the rocks, with men around her. One of the men was whispering to her.

"Turn your back to us, Toory," she called suddenly.

He turned around. His knees clanked with their trembling, but he steadied himself.

"Now lie down, Toory. Flat—all the way down."

He lay staring up the wavering eyebeams. He could see the clouds high up, flushed with the dawnlight. An aircar was drifting past, up there, but an aircar was not a danger to Miss Babs.

"We're sending a man up to take the fuse out, Toory. Turn over, face down. That's it. Do this for me, Toory."

He lay with his face pressing into the rocky ground. The rock was dark and blurred, so close to his eye-lenses. He could remember how proud he'd felt down there in the warm sunlit valley standing under wait-command beside Miss Babs. She had said that the little brook as it babbled over the stones was laughing. It was always happy, because it laughed all the time. How he wished that he could hear the brook now.

"The Erg man is coming," the girl called. "Don't move, Toory."

It was very strange that Miss Babs would order this. He tried desperately to reason why, but he could not.

Now he heard her voice again. "Will you lie quiet, Toory, while he takes out the fuse? Answer me."

"Yes, Miss Babs. I will lie quiet."

Now the Erg man was bending over him. He pressed his face down harder against the rock. And there was Babs' voice calling once more—her voice with something in it that Toory never had heard directed at him before. It was the voice humans used to one another.

"Goodbye, Toory."

He was so desperately frightened . . .

The fuse of Model 2 RY came out with a little click. The hissing, throbbing tumult inside the glistening body faded into silence. The turgid red eyebeams, down against the rock, went dark. Something which had been was gone, and there was left only a motionless piece of machinery.

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SPIDER'S WAR by S. Fowler Wright. Abelard-Schuman, N. Y. $2.75.

S. Fowler Wright's most original and powerful book, THE WORLD BELOW, brings its protagonist into a distant future where man's descendants were Gulliver-sized hairless giants who lived far underground and made war against a race of colossal insects on the opposite side of Earth. Fowler Wright specializes ably in such massive concepts. SPIDER'S WAR is a serious study on a parallel theme describing an unpleasant future. In it we encounter mammoth spiders who have developed superior intelligence and have become formidable adversaries of degenerated semi-primitive men.

As in most of Wright's other sixteen science fiction novels, we find again a strong antipathy to modern technological advancement which he blames for our social and moral ills. He is against birth control, thinks little of the lower classes, and is something of a Rousseauan primitivist. Like C. S. Lewis, he depicts scientists

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as satanic creatures and uses science mainly to rebuke it. He writes, however, in a rich, almost biblical style and is a consistently able story teller.

However, SPIDER'S WAR is weakened at the very start when Wright maneuvers his lead character into the future in a hackneyed, transparent and semi-mystical manner. This evasive shortcut is reminiscent of the unconvincing techniques of Edgar Rice Burroughs and other writers of the old outmoded scientific romance. It is with this school that Wright has some undoubted basic kinship.

His characters, alas, all speak identically in the same formal English. It takes, unfortunately, fifty pages for the story to get started. Once past the slow start, however, you will feel an excitement until the end. For SPIDER'S WAR, with all its shortcomings, is a novel above the average.

ENGINEERS' DREAMS by Willy Ley. Viking Press, N. Y. $3.50.

Engineers' dreams are special projects which are feasible from an engineering standpoint but cannot materialize chiefly because of political or economic reasons. For example, a tunnel from Calais to Dover, begun 50 years ago, remains a dream today solely because of active opposition by the British War Office. The Jordan Valley Project to irrigate and furnish electric power to Palestine would become a reality if the Kingdom of Jordan and the State of Israel were to cooperate instead of oppose each other. Plans to flood the Congo Basin as it was fifteen or twenty thousand years ago poses the serious problem that every country involved would benefit except Belgium—the country owning the land.

Lybia's deadly climate could be improved flooding the Quattara Depression—but no project could succeed here because there is no financial profit in it. The same, unfortunate reason holds true for a scientific plan for the floating islands in the Atlantic Ocean.

Willy Ley gives us other thought-provoking illustrations in his brilliantly conceived book which may be instrumental in helping some of these excellent ideas become scientific and engineering realities one day. ENGINEERS' DREAMS is without doubt a stimulating non-fiction book for progressive-thinking science fiction readers.

BORN OF MAN AND WOMAN by Richard Matheson. Chamberlain Press, Philadelphia, Pa. $3.00.

In 1950 Richard Matheson, a young man with an avid penchant for experimenting daringly in subject matter, style and plot, created a sensation through magazine publication of his first short story,

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BORN OF MAN AND WOMAN. Chosen by Martha Foley for her anthology of distinguished American short stories, it is still one of Matheson's best tales and stands up strongly upon re-reading.

This anthology is significant because it is the first collection of science-fantasy stories by one of our most talented new writers.

Matheson's unusual empathy enables him to create a wide range of characters all the way from humdrum, frustrated humans to the wildest monsters of interplanetary nightmares. His style is versatile. He writes delightfully in the simple narration of an innocent child or deftly in the second person. Constantly he strives to deviate from the orthodox. Sometimes he attempts to repeat his most successful ideas from a new angle. That is why, as a rule, one would prefer not to read too many of Matheson's stories at one sitting. Matheson is definitely en route, swiftly and surely, but he has not arrived quite yet. He is certainly a recognized talent with a little more punch and finish and originality than most in the field.

TOMORROW by Philip Wylie. Rinehart & Co., N. Y. $3.50.

Frequent though the theme of atomic destruction is in science-fiction, never before have I read a more shattering depiction of the disintegration of a city. If till now there remains anyone with "soul so dead" as to be unmoved by the terrifying possibilities of a nuclear war, Wylie's novel will alter this state. The most vegetative mind cannot help but be uncomfortably stirred by the awesome and convincing A-attack described.

Woven into the holocaust, however, is a shallow threadbare plot unworthy of the man who previously penned such conspicuously brilliant science-fiction novels as THE DISAPPEARANCE and WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE.

The literary qualities of TOMORROW are hopelessly strangled between a girl who is forced to wed a wealthy villain to cover her father's embezzlements and a newspaper editor who loses his job but salvages his integrity by writing an editorial in favor of civilian defense. Characters are divided into "good" and "bad" with all those active in civilian defense spared destruction and all those opposed to it either killed, crippled or driven insane. Even the cobalt bomb we use in retaliation decides to limit its earth destroying potential and the novel ends on an unconvincing but cheerful note in which a new and brighter existence begins for all survivors, now that nuclear fission has fissioned away most of the evils existing before the attack.

Wylie himself confesses that TOMORROW is "definitely rigged with its share of corn" to make a point. "A relatively few people think with detachment, intelli-

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gence. Most do not. I wanted this book to be the UNCLE TOM'S CABIN of the atomic age."

SEARCH THE SKY by Frederik Pohl and C. M. Kornbluth, Ballantine Books. Hardcover, $2. Paper, 35c.

What happened to the people who journeyed from Earth for several hundred years to colonize the far planets beyond our universe. Ross starts out from Haley's Planet to find the answer.

This novel crackles with the same action, drama and wit that characterized the authors classic SPACE MERCHANTS. It contains the same underlying concern for human beings, whether they are on future Madison Avenues or in the outer galaxies. This is a beautifully written yarn.

THE CAVES OF STEEL by Isaac Asimov. Doubleday. $2.95.

Asimov writes with a brisk, smooth, straightforward style of a society dominated by space travelers and robots. He is at home with this theme because of his early specialization in robot stories, having developed the three laws of robotics. Containing little science fiction, his new novel is a good, fast-moving murder mystery which will hold your interest right up to the last page. This is one you shouldn't miss.

BORN LEADER by James T. McIntosh. Doubleday. $2.95.

The basic theme of this book has been exploited time and again —the colonization of other planets when Earth is ultimately destroyed. When this occurs, the destiny of tiny colonies of refugees from a dying Earth will depend upon its leaders. At any rate, such is the thesis of this author, who maintains that born leaders (by inheritance and instinct) will emerge to enable each group of colonies to survive.

A handful of refugees who fled from Earth's final blowup to a new planet called Mundis, institute too many social and technological taboos to avoid replanting cultural seeds of disaster. At odds with this static society is a rebellious offspring—a born leader. Conflict comes to this weaponless planet with the advent of a second group of survivors who had fled to Mundis' sister planet and evolved a militaristic caste. But the born leader saves the day.

Scottish-born ex-journalist McIntosh, who last year wrote WORLD OUT OF MIND, has a rare ability to mix scientific ingenuity with first-rate story telling. BORN LEADER is a fast-paced adventure with sustained interest. Good for science-fiction novitiates because its science comes in small, easy-to-take doses.

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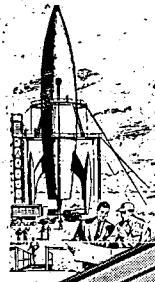

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